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Hurricane Response:

1 Some in Crossroads must still boil water, Victoria Advocate, 9/13/17

<https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2017/sep/13/some-in-crossroads-must-still-boil-water/>

About 2,500 households in the Crossroads are still boiling their water after a Category 4 hurricane made landfall on the Texas Coast. The number comes from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Calhoun County and Victoria County have the most water systems under a boil water notice, with four each.

2 Why the U.S. Government Is Tapping In to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve

http://host.madison.com/business/investment/markets-and-stocks/why-the-u-s-government-is-tapping-in-to-the/article_c1c6734f-0ef6-5dc4-a3a9-7376cc540bb4.html

Hurricane Harvey did untold amounts of damage to Texas -- preliminary estimates for the cost of recovery are around \$190 billion. In this clip from Industry Focus, Motley Fool analysts Sarah Priestley and Taylor Muckerman explain why that total is so huge, and what it means for the oil industry that Energy Secretary Rick Perry announced it was lending 500,000 barrels of oil to producer Phillips 66 (NYSE: PSX)

3 Texas begins long march toward recovery from Hurricane Harvey, La Vernia News, 9/14/17

<http://www.lavernianews.com/article.php?id=2523&n=featured-column-texas-begins-long-march-toward-recovery-hurricane-harvey>

As contaminated waters receded and mountains of debris from flooded homes and ruined belongings grew last week, a picture of post-hurricane Texas developed and the process of weighing impacts to lives, property, and infrastructure began. Gov. Greg Abbott delivered a series of announcements and proclamations related to catastrophic flooding and wind damage brought by Hurricane Harvey to more than 50 Gulf Coast and inland counties in late August and early September.

4 Cities Swimming in Raw Sewage as Hurricanes Overwhelm Systems, Gov Tech, 9/14/17

<http://www.govtech.com/em/disaster/Cities-Swimming-in-Raw-Sewage-as-Hurricanes-Overwhelm-Systems.html>

Hurricane Harvey took aim at one of the nation's most industrial regions, releasing a stream of toxic pollutants from chemical plants, refineries and Superfund sites in Texas. But when its bigger sister Irma slammed into Florida, environmental alarms rang over a different kind of discharge: raw sewage. Millions of gallons of poorly treated wastewater and raw sewage flowed into the bays, canals and city streets of Florida from facilities serving some of the nation's fastest-growing counties.

5 With Mosquito Threat Growing, Harris County Begins Aerial Sprays, Houston Press, 9/13/17

<http://www.houstonpress.com/news/with-mosquito-threat-growing-because-of-harvey-county-begins-aerial-sprays-of-dibrom-9787576>

With standing water and piles of debris from Hurricane Harvey creating breeding grounds for mosquitoes, the Harris County Public Health Department has authorized the aerial spraying of Dibrom, an EPA-approved pesticide, over 600,000 acres of the county starting Thursday. "About 10 to 14 days after a flood like this, you're going to have an increase in mosquito activity," said Dr. Umair A. Shah, the executive director of the public health department, in an interview with the Houston Press on Tuesday. "We're already seeing it."

6 Air Pollution From Industry Plagues Houston In Harvey's Wake, NPR, 9/17/17

<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/09/14/550472740/air-pollution-from-industry-plagues-houston-in-harveys-wake>

On the first sunny day in Houston after about 50 inches of rain, residents in the east Houston community of Manchester emerged from their homes and gave thanks that their neighborhood had been spared in the floods. "Mama, yeah, I just feel blessed," said 73-year-old Maria Julia Rodriguez, standing in her driveway in late August and marveling at her luck. "God was looking out for us, I guess."

7 Hurricane Harvey Alert: Addressing Environmental Releases and Obligations, National Law Review, 9/13/17

<https://www.natlawreview.com/article/hurricane-harvey-alert-addressing-environmental-releases-and-obligations>

As the cleanup begins, companies face challenges in meeting existing environmental obligations and addressing the environmental impacts of the storm. The havoc caused by Hurricane Harvey, including in some instances environmental crises caused by the storm, has been widely reported.

8 Harvey-Damaged Water Systems To Receive Emergency Aid from Loan Program, KUHT, 9/13/17

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2017/09/13/237027/harvey-damaged-water-systems-to-receive-emergency-aid-from-loan-program/>

Texas is set to receive faster aid for water systems hit by Harvey, with the Environmental Protection Agency agreeing to speed up funding for water infrastructure repairs. State environmental regulators said Tuesday that 20 drinking water systems and 31 wastewater systems were still shut down from Harvey. In the Houston area, that's led to potentially-dangerous bacteria levels in floodwaters.

Around the Region:

9 Houston EPA lab set to close, Express News, 9/13/17

<http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Houston-EPA-lab-set-to-close-12195927.php>

Conservationists and labor union officials argued Wednesday that the potential closing of the Environmental Protection Agency's regional lab in Houston, which is expected to play a key role in Hurricane Harvey recovery, is among harmful impacts of the Trump administration's drive to slice staff and mission in the agency. The EPA's Region 6 Environmental Services Laboratory, which serves a five-state region, is scheduled for closing when the lease on its rented, 41,000 square-foot space in southwest Houston expires in 2020, officials of the American Federation of Government Employees said they were told.

10 Cattle company won't move dairy facility to Panhandle amid resident opposition, Lubbock Avalanche, 9/13/17

<http://lubbockonline.com/local-news/news/2017-09-13/cattle-company-won-t-move-dairy-facility-panhandle-amid-resident>

A proposal by Bowers Land and Cattle Family to move a dairy facility just west of Panhandle was withdrawn Tuesday evening during a public meeting in which hundreds gathered in opposition. Chandler Bowers stunned the audience when he formally withdrew his family's request to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to operate a dairy cattle facility a half mile north of County Road J and Highway 60.

11 UNT named one of the top green power users by the EPA, North Texas Daily, 9/14/17

<http://ntdaily.com/unt-named-one-of-the-top-green-power-users-by-the-epa/>

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) named UNT No. 11 on its Green Power Partnership Top 30 College and University list. UNT participates in green programming through the Student Sustainability Office's We Mean Green Fund (WMGF), a fund every student pays into with a \$5 environmental service fee during the spring and fall semesters. WMGF is dedicated to limiting UNT's effect on the environment.

12 'Ozone Action Day' declared for Austin area, KVUE, 9/13/17

<http://www.kvue.com/weather/0913-austin-ozone-action-day/474388101>

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has issued an Ozone Action Day for Austin and San Antonio metro areas for Wednesday. Action days are declared when the Air Quality Index (AQI) gets to the level where the air is unhealthy for sensitive groups, and higher levels of ozone are possible. "Ozone mainly forms in the highest concentrations on warm, sunny days with light wind speeds, which allows more of the pollutant to form and accumulate," TCEQ said.

13 Lead at Cross Bayou site 31 times safe level: site report, Shreveport Times, 9/14/17

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/2017/09/14/lead-cross-bayou-site-31-times-safe-level-site-report/653969001/>

It's unclear whether the City of Shreveport will continue to buy land at the Cross Bayou project site now that the city council has killed Mayor Ollie Tyler's bond funding proposal. Shreveport Chief Administrative Officer Brian Crawford at a public meeting hosted Aug. 30 by the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce that the city would proceed with negotiating for the land along Cross Bayou regardless of whether the Pelicans chose Shreveport as home for a minor league affiliate.

14 U.S. and Mexico set to sign landmark Colorado River water-sharing deal, Desert Sun, 9/13/17

<http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2017/09/13/u-s-and-mexico-set-sign-landmark-colorado-river-water-sharing-deal/663017001/>

The U.S. and Mexican governments are close to signing a landmark Colorado River deal that will establish rules for sharing water over the next decade and lay out cooperative efforts intended to head off severe shortages. Mexican and American officials have scheduled a signing ceremony on Sept. 26 in Ciudad Juárez, officials at California water districts said this week. They said that formal event will be followed by a ceremonial signing in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Sept. 27 attended by representatives from U.S. states.

15 HOUSTON EPA LAB SLATED TO CLOSE, PSMAG, 9/14/17

<https://psmag.com/environment/houston-epa-lab-slated-to-close>

The Environmental Protection Agency's regional lab in Houston, Texas, is slated to close in 2020, the Houston Chronicle reports. The Region 6 Environmental Services Laboratory, which is expected to be a hub of soil and water testing in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, employs about 50 people and serves five states.

16 Texas begins long march toward recovery from Hurricane Harvey, La Vernia News, 9/14/17

<http://www.lavernianews.com/article.php?id=2523&n=featured-column-texas-begins-long-march-toward-recovery-hurricane-harvey>

As contaminated waters receded and mountains of debris from flooded homes and ruined belongings grew last week, a picture of post-hurricane Texas developed and the process of weighing impacts to lives, property, and infrastructure began. Gov. Greg Abbott delivered a series of announcements and proclamations related to catastrophic flooding and wind damage brought by Hurricane Harvey to more than 50 Gulf Coast and inland counties in late August and early September.

17 They got hundreds of thousands to rally. Where does the March for Science go from here?, STAT, 9/14/17

<https://www.statnews.com/2017/09/14/march-for-science-future/>

The hundreds of thousands of people who rallied on the National Mall and in cities worldwide for the March for Science in April came to be noticed. It was a march meant to demonstrate enthusiasm and political clout, and by those measures, organizers believe they succeeded. But as two dozen of them met in New York the following month

for a debrief, they faced an obvious reality: A grass-roots organization that was quickly formed to plan a singular event was not, at least immediately, equipped for far-reaching and long-term science advocacy.

18 Houston's 'flood czar' says Harvey has brought the city to a decision point on flood control, Texas Tribune, 9/13/17

<https://www.texastribune.org/2017/09/13/follow-conversation-houstons-flood-czar/>

When we caught up with Houston's newly-appointed "flood czar" last year, he told us he had no money and no staff. That's still largely the case, Stephen Costello told us in an interview on Tuesday at his Houston City Hall office. He now has one paid staff member.

19 Louisiana will use \$20 million in BP fines to expand a coastal monitoring program, Lens, 9/13/17

<http://thelensnola.org/2017/09/13/louisiana-will-use-20-million-in-bp-fines-to-expand-a-coastal-monitoring-program/>

Louisiana has received \$19.5 million in fines from the 2010 BP oil spill to expand a system to collect data on the effect of coastal restoration projects. The System-Wide Assessment and Monitoring Program, or SWAMP, monitors changes in Louisiana's ecosystem over time. Among other things, it evaluates how human factors like restoration projects and climate change affect the environment, including wildlife, fisheries and certain types of vegetation.

20 Metro Council to consider requirements for higher building elevations, more green spaces for new construction in the floodplain, Advocate, 9/13/17

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/environment/article_ed983a6c-98a6-11e7-9330-b3a51215a367.html

In the future, new houses in Baton Rouge may need to be built higher, new neighborhoods could face additional drainage requirements, and construction of all types might have to allocate more green spaces. The Metro Council on Wednesday directed planning staff to review the city-parish's floodplain ordinance and think of ways to encourage building projects designed to keep residents dry in a storm.

21 Wildlife refuge in bad shape after hurricane, Victoria Advocate, 9/13/17

<https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2017/sep/13/wildlife-refuge-in-bad-shape-after-hurricane/>

Damaged marshland might displace whooping cranes this fall. Wade Harrell, who is coordinating the endangered species' recovery for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, got his first look at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Wednesday after Category 4 Hurricane Harvey made landfall Aug. 25.



Some in Crossroads must still boil water

Sept. 13, 2017 at 9:57 p.m.

Updated Sept. 13, 2017 at 10:30 p.m.



About 2,500 households in the Crossroads are still boiling their water after a Category 4 hurricane made landfall on the Texas Coast.

The number comes from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Calhoun County and Victoria County have the most water systems under a boil water notice, with four each.

In Calhoun County, Enchanted Harbor, Port Alto HOA District 1, Sunilandings Utilities, Port Alto WSC are under a boil water notice.

In Victoria County, residents in Arenosa Creek Estates and the Estates of Sandy Hill, as well as those served by Coletto Water and the Key Road Subdivision Water System, must boil their water.

Other water systems affected by Hurricane Harvey include Cape Carancahua WSC in Jackson County and the city of Austwell, according to a TCEQ [analysis](#) published Tuesday.

More than 135,000 households in Texas are under a boil water notice after the hurricane.



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http://host.madison.com/business/investment/markets-and-stocks/why-the-u-s-government-is-tapping-in-to-the/article_c1c6734f-0ef6-5dc4-a3a9-7376cc540bb4.html



Why the U.S. Government Is Tapping In to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve

newsfeedback@fool.com (Motley Fool Staff) Sep 13, 2017 Updated 11 hrs ago

Hurricane Harvey did untold amounts of damage to Texas -- preliminary estimates for the cost of recovery are around \$190 billion.

In this clip from Industry Focus, Motley Fool analysts Sarah Priestley and Taylor Muckerman explain why that total is so huge, and what it means for the oil industry that Energy Secretary Rick Perry announced it was lending 500,000 barrels of oil to producer Phillips 66 (NYSE: PSX). Find out what the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) is and how it functions, what investors need to be aware of about this loan, how this compares to other times the SPR has been tapped in the wake of a disaster, and more.

A full transcript follows the video.

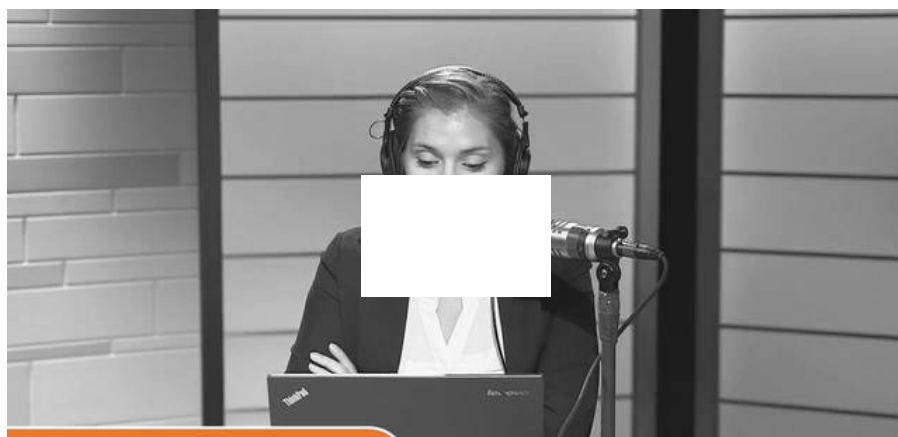
10 stocks we like better than Phillips 66

When investing geniuses David and Tom Gardner have a stock tip, it can pay to listen. After all, the newsletter they have run for over a decade, Motley Fool Stock Advisor, has tripled the market.*

David and Tom just revealed what they believe are the 10 best stocks for investors to buy right now... and Phillips 66 wasn't one of them! That's right -- they think these 10 stocks are even better buys.

[Click here to learn about these picks!](#)

*Stock Advisor returns as of September 5, 2017



7:57

This video was recorded on Sept. 7, 2017.

Sarah Priestley: Texan residents and business owners are left to survey the damage and long-term impact. Preliminary estimates for the cost of recovery are at \$190 billion. That figure would make this the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Taylor, part of the reason for this, I think, is the concentration of U.S. oil producing and refining industry. Five of the largest U.S. oil refineries are on the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast. Two of the largest refineries are near Houston. What will be the aftermath of this? What are they going to be dealing with now?

Taylor Muckerman: You have the Lake Charles area, big for refining. The Corpus Christi area, big for refining. Corpus Christi is almost back to pre-Harvey levels. They expect that a few more days, they'll be able to be quite near fully online. You look at, about 20% of the nation's refining capacity was shut down, so that's a big deal. And as a result, you've seen gas prices spike the most since Hurricane Katrina. The average price for regular unleaded, up \$0.33 nationwide, up to \$2.65 for the average. So people are feeling it. And that's probably going to last for several weeks, especially as you see, like you mentioned, other hurricanes potentially on the way. BP is already evacuating some of its Gulf platforms ahead of Hurricane Irma. So certainly still some risk out there for higher prices. The chemical industry is still offline as well, out of the ethylene production that they need to produce plastics. That's offline. So not only gasoline -- oil and chemicals all impacted. It's going to take a while for the supply chains for these to kick back in.

Priestley: Yeah. I read somewhere that the flooding has been the biggest issue they're about to deal with. It's kind of dangerous sometimes, especially fracking, if they get water in the wells, to start up again. And the other thing that people have got to consider is, the EPA is investigating potentially hazardous carcinogens in the area as a result of some of the explosions that we saw that took a lot of the media that may not be a huge impact on those companies, but on the people around, they definitely will. The reason that we're touching on this is, at the end of last week, the 31st of August, Energy Secretary Rick Perry announced that the Department of Energy is releasing oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve in an attempt to mitigate some of this disruption that we're talking about. This authorized the release of 500,000 barrels to Phillips 66's refinery in Lake

Charles. This is the first emergency release from the SPR since Hurricane Isaac hit Louisiana in 2012. We got a great question from a listener on Twitter asking, "What are the implications and impact of this?" But first, I thought it might be worth touching on what exactly the SPR is. So, Taylor?

Muckerman: Basically, it's our nation's fall-back plan, if oil imports either get disrupted or we necessarily have to cut off oil imports for any diplomatic reasons. So I think we have about 140-some days of technically U.S. demand for oil, which would then probably be used for gasoline and other things to keep the nation running for almost half a year. So tap this every now and then. It hasn't been tapped in a few years. I think President Obama did it at least once during his two terms as president. I don't think it's necessarily anything to get in an uproar about. It's only 500,000 barrels in this case out of a few hundred million, 700 million, I believe, just north of that. And we're at peak capacity right now in terms of how much oil is actually in the SPR. So it's not like we're starting from a position of weakness letting this out. And in this case, Phillips 66 is a company that tapped it for 500,000 barrels, and they do have to refill it and then some once the term of the agreement -- I haven't seen exactly how long they have to replace this, but I imagine it's not immediate.

Then, for the company itself, you look at it and the refinery that they're using this oil at, it's completely online, so we already talked about high gas prices, so maybe just try to take advantage of the fact that they still can refine some oil. This is in Lake Charles. They do have other refineries that aren't completely online. So maybe just trying to take advantage of some higher margins right now.

Priestley: Interesting. You mentioned this was to protect the U.S. from international issues. I think that's how they started the SPR. They became a founding member of the International Energy Agency after the oil embargo by OPEC in the '70s. Obviously, it's a very different environment now. So that raises a lot of questions that we'll touch on later.

Muckerman: Yeah, we're producing near-record oil in the United States. We were definitely producing oil back then as well, but I think there's a much clearer path to the U.S. sustaining its own oil production if need be.

Priestley: Yeah. You touched on this, but in this instance, this is an exchange, which basically means that the borrower -- in this case, Phillips -- is loaned the barrels. They then have to return the same amount back to the reserves, the same quality of oil, plus extra as interest. So Philips must have requested this exchange, as you said, because they're probably taking advantage of the greater crack spread.

Muckerman: Yes.

Priestley: Should investors be concerned about them servicing this loan? Is it an issue to make good on that loan?

Muckerman: No, I think it's a small enough amount to where, as an investor, maybe it's encouraging to see management trying all options to keep capacity and their inputs coming in, because a lot of pipelines in that area were disrupted. So not only have we seen production be impacted, but even the production in the oil fields that are still running, it's having a hard time making it to the endpoints here and refineries along the Gulf Coast, because not only were the refineries impacted, but the feeding pipelines were as well.

Priestley: Yeah. And a lot of the ports, I can't remember the term for it, but they're essentially filled with silt now, so they have to be excavated.

Muckerman: Yeah, they have to be dredged, probably. We'll wait to see that, because the Gulf area is the hub for all the oil exports that we've seen ramp up over the last couple of years since we released that limit on U.S. oil exportations.

Priestley: Yeah, which is incredible when you think about how vulnerable that area is. I know every area has its risks.

Muckerman: As far west as this one went, it was kind of a surprise to a lot of people. Mid- to eastern region of the Gulf usually gets hit almost on a yearly basis. But as far west as Houston, kind of a shock there.

Priestley: Yeah, it's new to me. We have a lot of rain, but not hurricanes. I think, you said this already, but talking about how serious this is and what the impact is, I think it's important to remember that the reserves are tapped during natural disasters. It's very usual. And, as you said, 500,000 is nothing compared to how it has been. 2008, Hurricane Gustav and Hurricane Ike, they reduced levels by 5.4 million barrels. 2005, Hurricane Katrina, 20.8 million barrels. So there is a precedent for this. We shouldn't be too concerned.

Muckerman: Yeah. When you look at 500,000 barrels, and we're producing 9 million barrels per day as a country, not exactly something to get in a fuss about.

Sarah Priestley has no position in any of the stocks mentioned. Taylor Muckerman owns shares of Twitter. The Motley Fool owns shares of and recommends Twitter. The Motley Fool has a disclosure policy.

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Cities Swimming in Raw Sewage as Hurricanes Overwhelm Systems

Millions of gallons of poorly treated wastewater and raw sewage flowed into the bays, canals and city streets of Florida from facilities serving some of the nation's fastest-growing counties.

BY JENNIFER A. DLOUHY AND ARI NATTER, BLOOMBERG NEWS / SEPTEMBER 13, 2017



A van drives on flooded streets in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey on Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2017, in Houston.

AP/MATT ROURKE



(TNS) - Hurricane Harvey took aim at one of the nation's most industrial regions, releasing a stream of toxic pollutants from chemical plants, refineries and Superfund sites in Texas. But when its bigger sister Irma slammed into Florida, environmental alarms rang over a different kind of discharge: raw sewage.

Millions of gallons of poorly treated wastewater and raw sewage flowed into the bays, canals and city streets of Florida from facilities serving some of the nation's fastest-growing counties. More than 9 million gallons of releases tied to Irma had been reported as of late Tuesday as inundated plants were submerged, forced to bypass treatment or lost power.

Such overflows, which can spread disease-causing pathogens, are happening more often, as population shifts and increasingly strong storms strain the capacity of plants and decades-old infrastructure. The Environmental Protection Agency estimated last year that \$271 billion is needed to maintain and improve the nation's wastewater pipes, treatment plants and associated infrastructure.

"There's no sewer system in the world that can be built that's completely leak proof," said Nathan Gardner-Andrews, chief advocacy officer for the National Association of Clean Water Agencies. Plants generally are designed to handle twice their normal capacity, but "when you get some of these rain events and you're talking four to six to eight inches of rain in an hour, the engineering is such that you cannot build a system to hold that capacity."

A treatment facility in Clearwater, Florida discharged 1.6 million gallons of wastewater into a creek, according to filings with the state's Department of Environmental Protection. The incident, which occurred after a power line snapped, was just a trickle compared to a 30-million-gallon discharge of raw sewage after Hurricane Hermine caused a pump failure in 2016, said David Porter, the city's public utilities director.

That scene was replayed across the state this week, as electrical outages caused lift station pumps to stop running in St. Petersburg and Orlando, prompting at least 500,000 gallons of overflows. A pipeline broke in Miramar, Florida, sending sewage spilling across a parkway as contractors hunted for the rupture. And operators of a Miami-area wastewater treatment plant blamed a power outage for 6 million gallons of sewage

released into Biscayne Bay.

Late Tuesday, there was no visible sewage or garbage in the Biscayne Bay water along Brickell, Florida, but in nearby Bayfront Park, the air was heavy with a foul odor.

As wastewater treatment lagged, utilities across the state warned residents to boil water before drinking it. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said it has deployed specialists to Florida to help get wastewater systems back online.

Estimated releases of untreated and poorly treated wastewater tied to both Irma and Harvey are expected to continue climbing. Even Hurricanes Hermine and Matthew — modest by comparison to this season's double whammy — forced the release of some 250 million gallons of wastewater without full treatment between Aug. 31 and Oct. 15, 2016, according to a report by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

After Hurricane Sandy ravaged the northeast U.S. in 2012, damaged treatment plants and pumping stations caused untreated sewage to flow into local waterways for weeks. All told, facilities in the eight states hardest hit by the super storm released 11 billion gallons of untreated and partially treated sewage, according to one assessment.

Wastewater treatment facilities are especially vulnerable to flooding because they are traditionally built in low-lying areas, near whatever river or waterway they discharge into. That approach works in normal conditions, but coastal treatment plants increasingly are outmatched during intense downpours and fierce storms, especially amid rising sea levels.

“Any time there is a large event — any kind of flood — they get overwhelmed and you have these raw sewage discharges,” said Ken Kopocis, who served as the top official in the EPA's water office under President Barack Obama.

That influx can overcome treatment facilities as well as the sewer systems designed to ferry water to them. In Middleburg, Florida, on Tuesday, a pretreatment system overflowed amid rising floodwaters, with a reported 250,000 gallons of untreated liquid released. Workers blocked off culverts to try and contain the spill and set up pump stations to pull water from ditches so it could be treated.

Normal flood stage at the site near Black Creek is 24 to 25 feet, but water was set to climb three feet higher. “We’ve never seen flooding like this,” said Dennis Martin of the Clay County Utility Authority.

Sewage discharges carry both health and economic risks, as officials may order the closing of affected beaches and rivers for swimming and boating long after storm clouds have passed. When untreated water or raw sewage is spilled, it can deliver toxic chemicals from roads, E. coli from human waste and other pathogens that have the potential to cause viruses, parasitic infections, rashes and other health conditions.

“We focus on the water and the flooding and the impacts to homes and everything else, which is super important,” said Danielle Droitsch, a program director with the Natural Resources Defense Council. “But understanding environmental contamination issues is more complicated. We don’t necessarily see the pollution, sometimes you can’t smell it and yet it’s there.”

Treatment plants are designed to remove most pollutants from wastewater before it is discharged — frequently into the same rivers used to supply drinking water to communities downstream. Initial treatment is focused on removing solid waste, pulling out heavier sludge after it settles in massive tanks and skimming off floating grease, plastics and other materials. A secondary, microbial treatment is meant to remove dissolved organic compounds, with hungry bacteria chewing through lingering contaminants.

During rainy storms and floods, inundated utilities generally focus on treating as much wastewater as possible, sometimes bypassing the secondary, microbial cleaning process when they near max capacity.

“The secondary treatment process is a very finely tuned group of organisms and bacteria, and if you get too much flow through this secondary process, it kills all your bugs,” Gardner-Andrews said. “So what you’re trying to do as a treatment plant operator during these extreme events is protect those bugs at all cost so once the rain goes away and the waters get back to normal you’re back online immediately.”

Many parts of Florida and Texas face infrastructure challenges even when they aren't deluged by rain because of rapid population growth. Some of the nation's fastest-growing counties are in the hurricane zone, according to U.S. Census data compiled by Bloomberg.

Four of the 10 fastest-growing coastal counties in the eastern U.S. are in Florida. The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach metropolitan area grew by 9 percent, adding about 500,000 people from 2010 to 2016. And St. Johns County, south of Jacksonville, grew by almost 24 percent during the same time frame, adding roughly 45,000 people.

Aging infrastructure may not be able to keep up with the demands of a surging southern population. In many cases, such as in south Florida, elements of the sewer system range from 60 to 70 years old, with pipelines that are even older, said Kelly Cox, a staff attorney and program director for the environmental group Miami Waterkeeper.

"You throw a hurricane on top of that, and you are starting to see a lot more problems," she said.

To become more resilient, utilities need to assess their risks and take action such as building berms, constructing dikes or adding elevation, Kopocis said, but "this stuff isn't necessarily cheap."

Some solutions may lie well beyond the treatment plants themselves. Cities constructed of impermeable concrete and pavement can encourage more ecologically sustainable development — everything from green roofs to more porous materials.

Local government officials and utilities also are lobbying Congress to pack wastewater spending into a broad infrastructure package, reminding lawmakers that already aging plants are going to be taxed by more frequent, more intense storms.

"If these outlier events are now going to become the norm, then we really need to be looking significantly at how do we make these utilities more resilient." Gardner-Andrews said. "These weather events are a perfect example of why water in general needs to be a critical part of any infrastructure package."

(With assistance from John McCormick, Terrence Dopp, Bailey Lipschultz and Nathan Crooks)

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(<http://www.govtech.com/em/disaster/When-the-Storm-is-as-Big-as-Florida-Where-Can-You-Evacuate-to.html>)

New Interactive Storm-Surge Map Helps Residents See Potential Flood Risks

(<http://www.emergencymgmt.com/disaster/New-Interactive-Storm-Surge-Map-Potential-Flood-Risks.html>)

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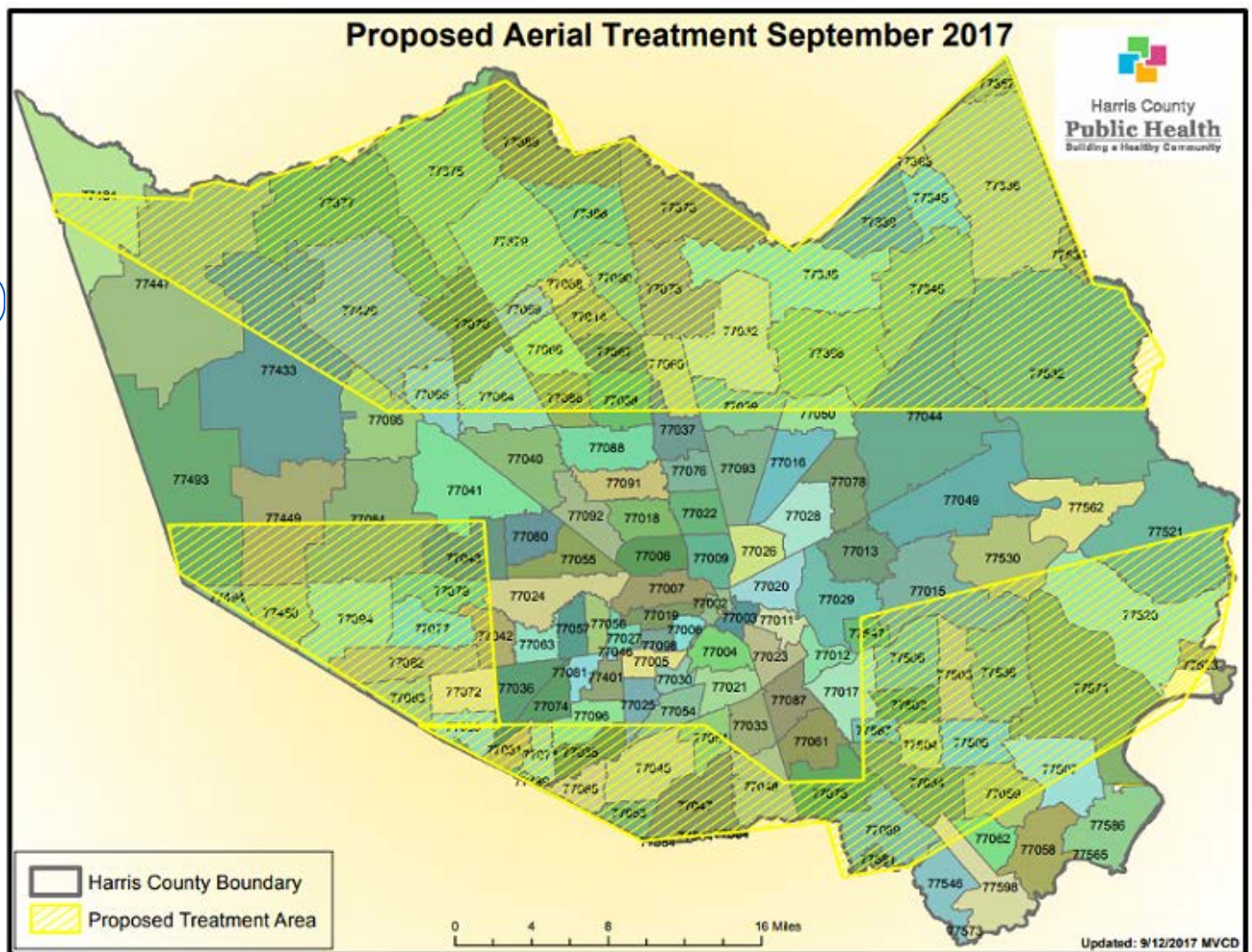
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Voting ends September 21st

With Mosquito Threat Growing, Harris County Begins Aerial Sprays

BY JOSEPH FANELLI

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2017 AT 1:37 PM.



Aerial sprays for mosquitoes will cover about 600,00 acres of Harris County.

Map courtesy of Harris County Public Health

With standing water and piles of debris from Hurricane Harvey creating breeding grounds for mosquitoes, the Harris County Public Health Department has authorized the aerial spraying of Dibrom, an EPA-approved pesticide, over 600,000 acres of the county starting Thursday.

“About 10 to 14 days after a flood like this, you’re going to have an increase in mosquito activity,” said Dr. Umair A. Shah, the executive director of the public health department, in an interview with the *Houston Press* on Tuesday. “We’re already seeing it.”

advertisement



The county has been “aggressively ground spraying” for mosquitoes since last week, Shah said, but with the increased risk of mosquitoes, has authorized C-130 cargo planes from the U.S. Air Force Reserve’s 910th Airlift Wing in San Antonio to drop Dibrom along Harris County’s north and southern borders.

Dibrom is the trade name of a chemical called Naled, which has been approved by the EPA since 1959 and has been used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after floods and hurricanes in the past. The insecticide caused some nervousness, though, in the United States after the European Union banned the substance in 2012, citing unhealthy side effects on aquatic life and humans who inhale the chemical or come into direct contact with it.

UPCOMING EVENTS

[Houston Texans vs. Indianapolis Colts](#)

Sun., Nov. 5, 12:00pm

TICKETS

[Rice Owls Football vs. Southern Miss](#)

Sat., Nov. 11, 2:30pm

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[Houston Texans vs. Arizona Cardinals](#)

But the CDC has said Naled is only dangerous in concentrations much higher than licensed professionals use during sprays. A 2008 study from the [American Mosquito Control Association](#) found that residents who lived in an area that was aerielly sprayed did not have higher levels of Naled in their system after sprays.

Sun., Nov. 19, 12:00pm

TICKETS

[Rice Owls Football vs. North Texas](#)

Sat., Nov. 25, 12:00pm

TICKETS

[Houston Texans vs. San Francisco 49ers](#)

Sun., Dec. 10, 12:00pm

TICKETS

Naled, though, has been reported to kill bees so beekeepers in affected areas should cover hives before spraying begins Thursday.

Harris County's health agency said residents concerned about the spray should stay indoors

during the flyovers, which could last several days.



Joseph Fanelli is a reporting fellow at the *Houston Press* with an interest in education, crime and eccentric people everywhere.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Air Pollution From Industry Plagues Houston In Harvey's Wake

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Heard on Morning Edition

REBECCA HERSHER



DAVID SCHAPER



A smokestack rises in the background over the East Houston community of Manchester, Texas, where the air was heavy with what smelled like gasoline after Hurricane Harvey in late August. The neighborhood is ringed by industrial sites.

Claire Harbage/NPR

On the first sunny day in Houston after about 50 inches of rain, residents in the east Houston community of Manchester emerged from their homes and gave thanks that their neighborhood had been spared in the floods. "Mama, yeah, I just feel blessed," said 73-year-old Maria Julia Rodriguez, standing in her driveway in late August and marveling at her luck. "God was looking out for us, I guess."

And yet, something was wrong. The air was heavy with the smell of gasoline and other harder-to-place odors. The neighborhood is ringed by industrial sites, the biggest of which is the Valero oil refinery, separated by fences from backyards and playgrounds. A lot of people in the neighborhood have lived there for decades, and say they're used to strange smells. Asked about a sickly sweet odor, Rodriguez said "that's how it always is here."

But at least one person was alarmed by what they smelled. They called Houston's 311 hotline to report it, the city health department was alerted and about 24 hours later an air monitor measured a concentration of benzene so high that the CDC recommends workers exposed to that level of the chemical wear breathing protection. Benzene exposure can cause headaches and nausea. Long-term exposure increases the risk of cancer.

The benzene plume in Manchester was one of dozens of unplanned air emissions caused by Harvey's flooding, some during the storm, others occurring for weeks after the rain stopped.



POLITICS

With Harvey And Now Irma, Federal Funds And FEMA Are Put To The Test

Much of the public health focus in Houston has been on the hazards posed by flood waters, but the city is also facing a crisis in air quality. Even under normal circumstances, "air quality is a big problem in Houston," says Loren Raun, the chief scientist for the Houston Health Department. "We put out more emissions than any other city." At least 7 million pounds of pollutants have been emitted in and around

Houston as a result of the storm so far, according to an analysis by the Environmental Defense Fund.



Maria Julia Rodriguez, 73, stands in her driveway in late August and marvels at her luck. "God was looking out for us, I guess."

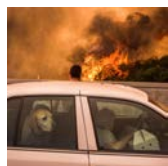
Claire Harbage/NPR

A long industrial recovery

And there is more to come. Much of the pollution is the result of refineries shutting down and restarting, which releases petrochemicals into the air. The Environmental Defense Fund warns that about half the refineries in the region still are not operating at full capacity, and as they restart facilities, they'll release more pollution.

Meanwhile, companies are still repairing acute damage from the storm, which caused additional emissions. A Dow Chemical site reported the facility that supplies its steam was hit by lightning during the storm. A chemical storage facility owned by Kinder Morgan reported a 10-day accidental release of 350 pounds of benzene, ethylbenzene,

hexane, toluene and xylene, and another 9571 pounds of other volatile organic compounds.



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According to the city health department, the benzene in Manchester was caused by a leaking tank at the Valero refinery. Benzene is stored in tanks with so-called floating roofs that sit on top of the liquid chemical and move up and down according to the level of the liquid. They're considered safer, in many ways, than tanks with fixed roofs, because there is no air gap for volatile gasses.

But the floating roofs are susceptible to flooding, because rain water can collect on top. When that happened to a Valero tank during Harvey, about 6.7 pounds of benzene leaked out and rapidly evaporated, according to a filing with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The chain link fences between the tanks and people's homes did little to stop the plume from spreading.

The company has not responded to NPR's inquiries about the status of cleanup or repair operations at the facility.

As of Tuesday, Raun said the concentration of benzene in the air in Manchester had dropped to the point where she was no longer concerned about the immediate health risks. But, she cautioned, the overall air quality problem in the city "is ongoing," with high levels of ozone as well, which can exacerbate respiratory symptoms.

"Those who are working outside, in the process of rebuilding, should be especially vigilant," says Elena Craft, a senior health scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund, an advocacy group. She says those who are most at risk, such as elderly people or people who already have respiratory diseases, need to be careful breathing outside air.



Hartman Park in the Manchester neighborhood of Houston. The overall air quality problem in the city "is ongoing," with high levels of ozone as well, which can exacerbate respiratory symptoms. People who are most at risk, such as elderly people or people who already have respiratory diseases, need to be careful breathing outside air.

Claire Harbage/NPR

'Why report it now?'

One of the challenges for Houston officials right now is keeping up with air quality measurements. "We have the largest number of air quality monitors of any city," Raun notes, but many of them didn't operate during the storm, and were inaccessible for a week or more because of flooding. "After the storm, there was nothing, no information. The lab was ok," where they test samples, "but no one could move."



SHOTS - HEALTH NEWS

Montanans Pitch In To Bring Clean Air To Smoky Classrooms

The city's air monitors are all up and running again now, she says, and they're also using a mobile air monitoring unit – a trailer they can park in different neighborhoods

to test for volatile organic chemicals, as well as ozone and particulate pollution. The EPA is also using a mobile air monitoring bus in southeast Houston, according to regional EPA spokesperson David Gray. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has not deployed its mobile air monitoring unit to the region.

A TCEQ statement said both agencies had shut down some air monitoring stations to protect them from the storm, and that 96 percent of those in Houston were back online as of Monday, with 100 percent expected by the end of the week. "Of the available air monitoring data collected from Aug. 24 through Sept. 10, all measured concentrations were well below levels of health concern," Gray told Shots in an email. That period includes the time during which high benzene levels were measured in Manchester by independent air monitors.

"We've seen lots of statements [saying things like] 'The air is perfectly fine; we haven't seen anything out of the ordinary with the monitoring units,' " says Craft. "I think that in some cases, they make assessments as to air quality prematurely." Craft's organization has partnered with a company in California that is testing the Houston air for volatile organic compounds including benzene, ethylbenzene toluene and xylene.

Raun says her local health department can use all the help it can get with monitoring the air. "It's a huge area, and we're monitoring as much as we can, but we also rely on people reporting," she says. The agency has been running a public information campaign to encourage people to report strange smells, headaches, burning eyes or other symptoms that could be related to chemical exposure. "In neighborhoods where we're getting less reporting, it could be that there's less [pollution]," she says. "But it could also be that it smells like that every day, so why report it now?"

Juan Parras, the executive director of Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, or TEJAS, has been doing community organizing in low-income East Houston neighborhoods for more than 15 years. He says monitoring the air and being transparent about what pollutants are present is too little too late for people who are breathing polluted air.

"We have had information about what they've been breathing in for years," Parras says, citing multiple studies showing carcinogens in the air, and elevated rates of cancer and respiratory illness in neighborhoods nestled among chemical plants and refineries.



Juan Parras, left, the executive director of Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, or TEJAS, talks with Kahler Stone and Jennifer Horney, part of a group from Texas A & M University who do soil and water testing in the Manchester neighborhood.

Claire Harbage/NPR

"These are low-income communities, people of color — no one wants to pay for relocation," he says. Parras doesn't see that changing after Harvey, although he hopes it will. "We've been talking about this problem for 15 years. What makes me believe they'll do something this time?"

"People need to understand, the area is not confined," Parras adds. "The pollution even moves into wealthy communities. They think they're not exposed, but they are."

hurricane harvey houston toxic chemicals air pollution

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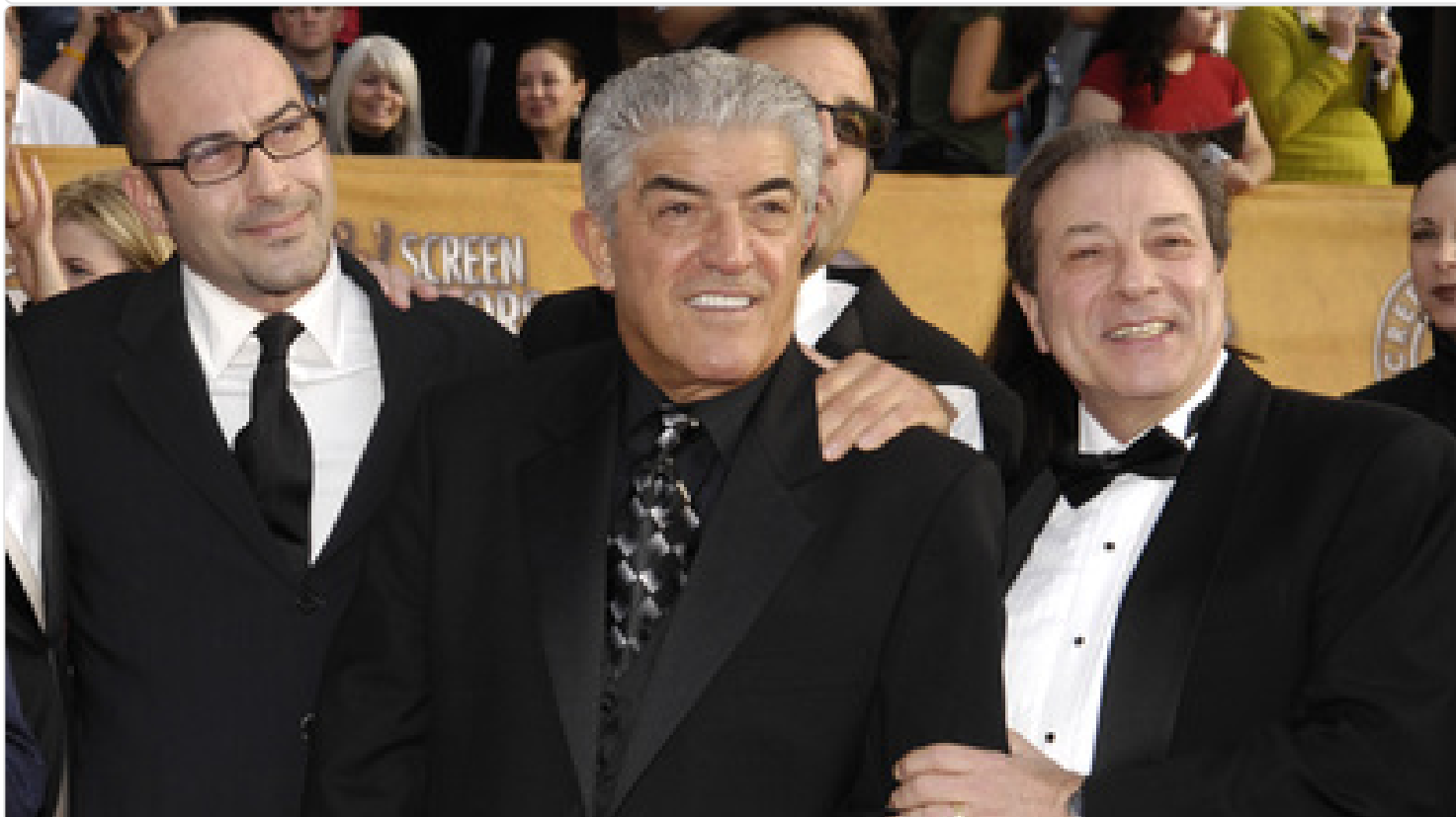
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Hurricane Harvey Alert: Addressing Environmental Releases and Obligations

Christopher B. Amandes
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Wednesday, September 13, 2017

As the cleanup begins, companies face challenges in meeting existing environmental obligations and addressing the environmental impacts of the storm.

The havoc caused by Hurricane Harvey, including in some instances environmental crises caused by the storm, has been widely reported. The scope and magnitude of the environmental issues caused by the storm continue to evolve as the waters recede. As they do, a host of questions have arisen and will continue to arise. The below Q&A attempts to address some of the most common environmental questions that are likely to arise for companies in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

DOES HURRICANE HARVEY EXCUSE COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL OBLIGATIONS?

Question: Due to Hurricane Harvey, my company is unable to meet its obligations under an environmental statute, regulation, permit, consent decree, settlement, or other agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and/or the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Does Hurricane Harvey excuse compliance?

Answer: It may. Environmental laws provide exemptions, releases from liability, relaxation of substantive standards, and/or an acceleration of certain processes during times of natural disaster. Related consent decrees or settlement agreements typically contain force majeure provisions and exceptions that similarly apply to disasters or acts of God.

Notable Exceptions Under Federal Environmental Laws

Below are examples (but not a comprehensive list) of relevant exceptions to federal environmental laws that may be applicable to your company during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

Oil Pollution Act (OPA)

- An act of God defense. 33 U.S.C. § 2703(a).

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)

- EPA may issue temporary emergency permits to permitted or nonpermitted facilities to allow treatment, storage, or disposal of hazardous wastes where there is imminent and substantial endangerment to human health or the environment. 40 C.F.R. § 270.61(a).
- Generally, RCRA does not require entities to obtain permits for treatment or containment activities in response to discharges of hazardous waste, the imminent threat of a discharge to hazardous waste, or an immediate threat to human health, public safety, property, or the environment from explosive materials. 40 C.F.R. §§ 264.1(g)(8), 265.1(c)(11), 270.1(c)(3).

Clean Air Act (CAA)

- Emission restrictions for fuel-burning stationary sources during national or regional energy emergencies. 42 U.S.C. § 7410(f).
- National emission standards for hazardous air pollutants from stationary sources when in the interests of national security. 42 U.S.C. § 7412(i)(4).
- Fuel additive requirements during natural disasters that cause extreme or unusual fuel and fuel additive supply circumstances. 42 U.S.C. § 7545(c)(4)(C).
- Transportation conformity requirements during emergencies or natural disasters. 40 C.F.R. § 51.853(d).
- Certain requirements under the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants for the demolition of asbestos-containing buildings when the building has been ordered torn down because it “is structurally unsound and in danger of imminent collapse.” 40 C.F.R. § 61.145(a)(3).

Clean Water Act (CWA)

- An act of God exception. 33 U.S.C. § 1321(f).
- Compliance may be excused during an upset, which means “an exceptional incident in which there is unintentional and temporary noncompliance with technology based permit effluent limitations because of factors beyond the reasonable control of the permittee.” 40 C.F.R. § 122.41(n)(1).
- Emergencies that require expedited procedures for the processing of permit applications by the Corps of Engineers. 33 C.F.R. § 325.2(e)(4).
- Exigent circumstances regarding discharges of oil and hazardous substances do not require permits. 33 U.S.C. § 1321(c); 40 C.F.R. § 122.3(d).

Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA)

- An act of God defense. 42 U.S.C. § 9607(b)(1).
- Emergency removal actions. 42 U.S.C. § 9604(a); 40 C.F.R. § 300.440.
- Relaxation of remedial standards if compliance “would result in greater risk to human health.” 42 U.S.C. § 9621(d)(4).

Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

- Allows the president to authorize federal actions that are inconsistent with state coastal plans if the president finds it is in the paramount interest of the country, or the secretary of commerce determines it is a matter of national security. 16 U.S.C. § 1456(c).

Notable Exceptions Under Texas Environmental Laws

Below are examples (but not a comprehensive list) of relevant exceptions to Texas environmental laws that may be applicable to your company in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

Enforcement and Force Majeure

- TCEQ enforcement provisions expressly provide that “force majeure” (defined, in part, as an act of God) is an affirmative defense. The entity applying the defense of “force majeure” has the burden to demonstrate that it applies and has the obligation to notify the state as provided by 30 Tex. Admin. Code § 305.125(9) (relating to Standard Permit Conditions).

Texas Water Code

- An act of God defense. Tex. Water Code § 7.251.
- The Texas Water Code contains specific emergency order provisions that address the following topics:
 - Suspension of Beneficial Inflows. Tex. Water Code § 5.506; 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter D.
 - Utilities. Tex. Water Code § 5.507; 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter E.
 - Water Quality. Tex. Water Code § 5.509; 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter F.
 - Solid Waste and Uranium By-Product. Tex. Water Code § 5.512; 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter G.
 - Storage Tanks. Tex. Water Code § 5.510; 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter I.
 - Air Emissions. Tex. Water Code § 5.515; Tex. Health & Safety Code § 382.063; and 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter K.
 - On-site Sewage. Tex. Water Code § 5.513; 30 Tex. Admin. Code, Chapter 35, Subchapter L.

Governor's Suspension of Procedural Laws

- The governor of Texas may suspend the provisions of any regulatory statute prescribing the procedures for conduct of state business or the orders or rules of a state agency if strict compliance with the provisions, orders, or rules would in any way prevent, hinder, or delay necessary action in coping with a disaster. Tex. Gov't Code § 418.016.
- The executive director of TCEQ requested written approval for the suspension of certain environmental rules in certain counties on August 28, 2017.

TCEQ Guidance and Disaster Response

- As per TCEQ guidance, TCEQ approval is not necessary for actions directly related to disaster response. Response actions pursuant to the guidance include "all reasonable actions necessary and prudent to facilitate, maintain, or restore fuel production and/or distribution, within the State of Texas, directly related to Hurricane Harvey."

Consent Decrees and Settlements

- Most consent decrees and settlements have an "act of God" or "force majeure" provision that excuses a party from performance when the circumstances outside the control of the person make performance impossible. The provision often describes what constitutes an "act of God" or "force majeure." A natural disaster generally creates the requisite circumstances for a party to a settlement or consent decree to claim force majeure. For example, any extreme flooding due to Hurricane Harvey that prevents critical personnel from performing their jobs, makes necessary supplies unavailable, renders a company unable to contain hazardous substances, or causes other similar circumstances may constitute a force majeure or an act of God.
- Notably, many force majeure provisions have notice requirements that are important prerequisites for claiming that an event delayed or impeded compliance with the consent decree or settlement.

WHAT DO I DO IF I AM UNABLE TO COMPLY WITH MY ENVIRONMENTAL OBLIGATIONS?

Question: How do I respond if my company is unable to meet its obligations under an environmental statute, regulation, permit, consent decree, or settlement with EPA and/or TCEQ due to Hurricane Harvey?

Answer: It is important to consult with counsel first, but counsel is likely to recommend that you contact EPA or your state environmental agency if you believe it is likely that you are unable to meet your obligations.

Steps to consider (in consultation with counsel) if your company is unable to comply with environmental obligations include the following:

1. Assess and list the reason(s) that your company may not be able to meet an environmental obligation.
2. Determine if the issue is an emergency that should be reported immediately. If so, you may need to contact your local law enforcement agency or state hotline.
3. You may need to contact EPA and/or the relevant state environmental agency to notify it that you may be unable to meet your environmental obligations. In doing so, you should consider steps necessary to create a record of the exact nature of the problem, any steps you have taken to mitigate, and any relief requested going forward.

4. You should consider mitigation to the extent possible.
5. You should retain all records of the event for future investigations.

For more guidance specific to Texas law, review the following TCEQ regulator guidance concerning Hurricane Harvey:

- Air Quality for Permitted Facilities: Responding to Hurricanes
- Wastewater–Treatment Plants: Responding to Disasters

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO ADDRESS CONTAMINATION THAT HAS MIGRATED ONTO MY PROPERTY OR THAT HAS ESCAPED FROM MY PROPERTY DUE TO FLOODING?

Question: Due to flooding, my company's property is covered in materials that may be hazardous and/or I have solid or hazardous materials onsite that may have escaped containment. What do I do?

Answer: In consultation with counsel and after review of any applicable cleanup agreement, notify the appropriate authorities and control the release as best possible. Written reports are often advisable.

Waste to be concerned about:

- Household hazardous waste
- Asbestos-containing material
- PCBs in transformers
- Petroleum products
- Firearms and ammunition
- Waste contained in underground storage tanks

Reporting spills:

- Federal: Oil spills and chemical releases may be reported to the National Response Center (NRC) hotline at +1.800.424.8802.
- Local: Notice of any spills or releases may also be provided to the Local Emergency Planning Commission.

TCEQ guidance:

- Generally, TCEQ exercises enforcement discretion in the event of a hurricane or other major natural disaster and can waive a 24-hour notice requirement.
- Contact the spill-reporting hotline at +1.800.832.8224.
- See TCEQ guidance on Spills, Discharges, and Releases.
- If you intend to burn debris, follow TCEQ guidance on Air Quality for Permitted Facilities: Responding to Hurricanes.

WHAT ACTIONS HAVE ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO HURRICANE HARVEY?

Question: What actions have EPA and/or TCEQ taken in response to Hurricane Harvey?

Answer: EPA and TCEQ have taken a number of actions in response to Hurricane Harvey, including the following:

U.S. EPA

- EPA Approves Emergency Fuel Waiver for Florida (09/06/2017)
- EPA Approves Emergency Fuel Waivers for 38 States and Washington, DC (08/31/2017)
- EPA Approves Emergency Fuel Waivers for Gulf and East Coast States (08/30/2017)
- EPA Approves Emergency Fuel Waivers for Texas and Georgia (08/29/2017)
- EPA Approves Emergency Fuel Waivers for Louisiana (08/28/2017)
- EPA Approves TCEQ Request to Expand Emergency Fuel Waivers (08/26/2017)
- EPA reports on Superfund sites affected by Hurricane Harvey (09/02/17). EPA has identified the following 13 Superfund sites as affected or potentially affected. The remaining 28 of 41 sites EPA inspected do not currently show damage or flooding

resulting from the hurricane.

1. Falcon Refinery
2. Brine Service
3. Bailey Waste Disposal
4. French LTD
5. Geneva Industries/Fuhrmann Energy
6. Gulfco Marine
7. Highland Acid Pit
8. Malone Services
9. US Oil Recovery
10. Patrick Bayou
11. Petro-Chemical Systems
12. Triangle Chemical
13. San Jacinto Waste Pits

Texas

- TCEQ request for suspension of certain rules submitted (8/28/17). This suspension only applies in counties that are the subject of the Governor's disaster proclamation(s).
- Disaster proclamations for counties
 - ■ Governor Abbott's initial proclamation
 - Additional counties added on August 26
 - Additional counties added on August 27
 - Additional counties added on August 28

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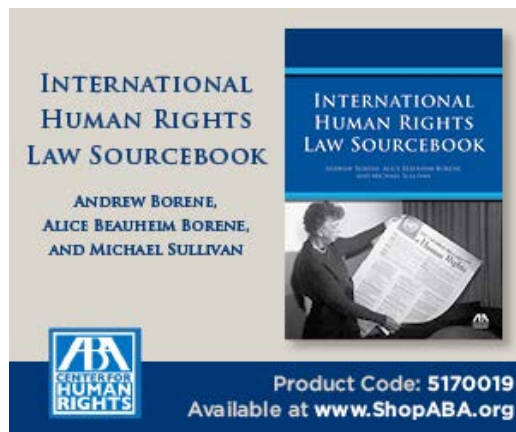
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“Our hope was to give those folks an opportunity and resources to get the work started right away.”

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00:05 / 01:04



City of Houston Emergency Operations Center
Houston's Turkey Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant is seen during flooding from Harvey on September 5, 2017. It was still shut down as of September 12, 2017.

Texas is set to receive faster aid for water systems hit by Harvey, with the Environmental Protection Agency agreeing to speed up funding water infrastructure repairs.

State environmental regulators said Tuesday that 20 drinking water systems and 31 wastewater systems were still shut down from Harvey. In the Houston area, that's led to potentially-dangerous bacteria levels in floodwaters.

Federal disaster aid is on the way, but in the meantime, the Texas Water Development Board has worked out a deal with the EPA to get \$1 billion in funded loans to cities for emergency repairs.

"Our hope was to give those folks an opportunity and resources to get the work started right away, and then ideally when they do get federal money a little further down the line, they can take that and pay off the loan," says Bech Brunn, the water board's chairman.

In the wake of Harvey, Governor Greg Abbott sent a letter to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt supporting the water board's request for assistance. Brunn says some of the expedited loans could also go to jump starting work on longer-term water infrastructure projects.

"The City of Houston will be considering larger-scale flood control projects moving forward, and we can fund those types of projects as we go," Brunn says.

The water board is making sure its plan won't make cities ineligible for separate FEMA aid down the road, but once that's resolved, the board says it will start taking applications for the emergency loans.

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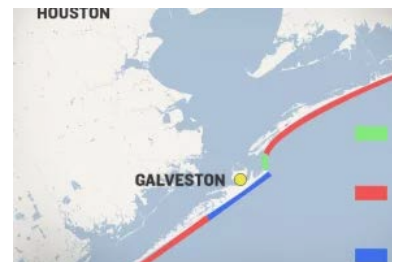
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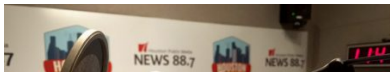
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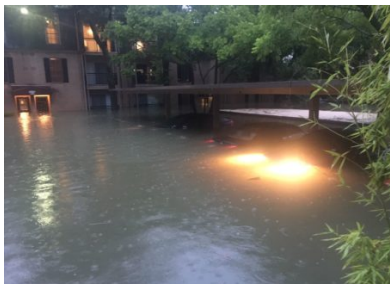
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Houston EPA lab set to close

By Bill Lambrecht, Washington Bureau | September 13, 2017 | Updated: September 13, 2017 7:46pm

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Photo: ERIC THAYER, STR / NYT

A worker collects water samples in neighborhoods affected by flooding from Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Sept. 5, 2017. Hurricane Harvey cut a path through industrial corridors, raising concerns about pollution and runoff, and Griffin's property lies a few hundred yards from a Superfund site that was inundated in the storm. (Eric Thayer/The New York Times)

WASHINGTON — Conservationists and labor union officials argued Wednesday that the potential closing of the Environmental Protection Agency's regional lab in Houston, which is

expected to play a key role in Hurricane Harvey recovery, is among harmful impacts of the Trump administration's drive to slice staff and mission in the agency.

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(/)

Posted September 13, 2017 05:12 pm

By Lisa Lamb (/authors/lisa-lamb)

lisa.lamb@amarillo.com

Cattle company won't move dairy facility to Panhandle amid resident opposition



PANHANDLE — A proposal by Bowers Land and Cattle Family to move a dairy facility just west of Panhandle was withdrawn Tuesday evening during a public meeting in which hundreds gathered in opposition.

Chandler Bowers stunned the audience when he formally withdrew his family's request to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to operate a dairy cattle facility a half mile north of County Road J and Highway 60.

"We never intended for this to have any negative effect on our neighbors or the community," Bowers said. "We continue to believe that a dairy operation in Carson County would be of significant benefit to the area,

however, we are fully aware of the concerns by many of you represented tonight ... at this time we will be presenting a letter to the TCEQ requesting the permit application for the proposed dairy be withdrawn."

The audience stood and erupted into cheers after Bowers made the announcement. During a recess, several people made their way to Bowers to extend their gratitude and appreciation.

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"It's humbling, it's hard — it was a hard decision and it wasn't taken lightly," he said.

"Agriculture is a very vital part of our well being and we have a lot to educate the public on how these things really work — not in a bad way.

Bowers countered some of the prevailing issues people expressed out the potential dairy farm, including the smell and potential water contamination.

"There wouldn't have been the flies and the smell that everybody thought," he said. "I challenge everybody to visit a dairy, the American Dairy Association would be glad to teach you. (Regarding) the water usage and the contamination, the dairy industry does a good job of taking care of both and following the rules."

Another issue raised by concerned citizens was the recycling of bovine waste into the land's irrigation system.

"You can only do that to a certain extent," Bowers said. "If they get it too stout, they can't grow a crop in it ... it's an all natural way of fertilizing the land. If every farmer had the access to it, they would use it. That's also a part of the regulation process."

Bowers said he didn't know what they would do with the family-owned land they proposed to build on. It has been in use as a farm for nine years.

State Rep. Four Price, whose office asked for the formal meeting, said he was pleased with the turnout and addressed the audience before Bowers spoke.

"I think TCEQ does a good job analyzing information and I think they want to hear from our community," said Price, R-Amarillo. "(We wanted people) to have an opportunity to voice support, opposition or concerns as a very important part of the process."

Of the roughly 2,600 people living in Panhandle, about one-fifth showed up to a town hall meeting in June where the TCEQ was not present.

Citizens expressed a range of concerns including water contamination, property values, community growth and traffic safety.

Panhandle Mayor Doyle Robinson said 600 signatures had been added to a letter of comment since Sunday against the dairy farm.

"The prevailing winds will take it right across the community," said Robinson.

"It" being what Amarillo:
from Hereford's feed ya

"We're not anti dairy or anti farm or ag culture, it's just a bad location," Robinson said. "It's in a place where it would be along Highway 60 and the way it would flow ... into a playa lake. Everything about it was wrong as far as wind and so forth."

Robinson said Amarillo engineering firm Parkhill, Smith & Cooper studied the proposal and found contamination of the aquifer, water wells and the underground water supply was possible.

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"We have water wells within one mile of where they'd be putting out manure on the land through sprinklers and so forth," Robinson said.

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UNT named one of the top green power users by the EPA



September 14 09:00
2017

by Sean Riedel

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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) named UNT No. 11 on its Green Power Partnership Top 30 College and University list.

UNT participates in green programming through the Student Sustainability Office's We Mean Green Fund (WMGF), a fund every student pays into with a \$5 environmental service fee during the spring and fall semesters. WMGF is dedicated to limiting UNT's effect on the environment.

Earlier this year, UNT enrolled in Denton Municipal Electric's GreenSense Renewable Electricity Program. This allowed the university to purchase [one year of Renewable Energy Credits \(RECs\)](#) to cover UNT's electricity use on the main campus and at Discovery Park. RECs are a non-tangible energy good that is issued when one megawatt-hour of electricity is created from a renewable energy resource.

UNT used 107,250,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of energy, which 100 percent of was renewable during the last annualized partner contract amounts (kilowatt-hours), according to a [report released by the EPA in July](#).

UNT's off-site energy is produced by wind turbines and solar arrays from other areas in Texas.

Comparatively, the list's No. 1 ranked institution, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, used 250,070,000 kWh, of which 94 percent was renewable. At No. 11, UNT was the third school on the list to have reached 100 percent.

"We're getting 'beat' by institutions that just have a larger energy need than us," said Gary Cocke, Coordinator at the Student Sustainability Office. "We're really just limited by the fact that we don't use as much energy as some of those people that are ranked more highly than we are. So, we're ranked about as high as we can be."

Cocke said UNT should be a leader in the community of renewable energy.

"If we are able to influence and inspire other schools to pursue similar strategies and if they make it to 100 percent renewable as well, I would be happy to see more schools on this list," Cocke said. "And if our ranking actually ends up falling because of that, but we're leading the way, I'm happy to have that."

UNT President Neal Smatresk stated in an email he was proud of the programs UNT has implemented.

"UNT was going green and reducing our carbon footprint long before it was the trendy thing to do," Smatresk said. "UNT will continue leading the way in green initiatives and do all we can to ensure a better tomorrow for our



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environment and our communities.”

According to the EPA, UNT's green power use is equivalent to the electricity use of nearly 10,000 average American homes annually. The university also ranks No. 72 on the agency's National Top 100 list of green power users.

While Cocke acknowledged being near the top of the list is great, there is still room to grow, with the next step being efficiency.

“There are two sides to the coin when it comes to renewable energy,” Cocke said. “We want it to be renewable, but we want it to be as efficient as we can get. So we can start looking at things like smart lighting [which shuts off automatically when you leave the room]. Maybe working on the outside lighting.”

Psychology freshman Baylee Knodel is glad to call such an environmentally conscious school her home.

“Attending UNT gives me peace of mind that we're doing our part to help the planet,” Knodel said. “I'm proud to attend a university that's so environmentally friendly.”

To find out more information about UNT's Green Power efforts and GreenSense, go to <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/sustainable/greensense>. There you will also have access to a survey. The results will be presented to the WMGF in order to determine if GreenSense will be renewed for four more years at UNT.

Featured Image: UNT has three wind turbines outside of Victory Hall that power the university's off site locations. *Madison Gore*

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'Ozone Action Day' declared for Austin area

KVUE 10:10 AM. CDT September 13, 2017

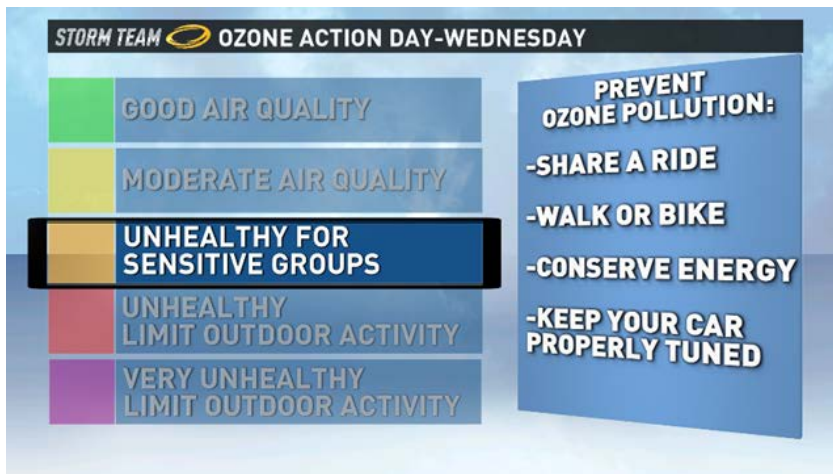


(Photo: Trejo, Rebeca, KVUE)

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has issued an Ozone Action Day for Austin and San Antonio metro areas for Wednesday.

Action days are declared when the Air Quality Index (AQI) gets to the level where the air is unhealthy for sensitive groups, and higher levels of ozone are possible. "Ozone mainly forms in the highest concentrations on warm, sunny days with light wind speeds, which allows more of the pollutant to form and accumulate," TCEQ said.

Active children and adults, along with those with lung disease and asthma, are advised to reduce prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors. People can help prevent ozone pollution by sharing a ride, walking or riding a bicycle, avoiding drive through lanes, conserving energy and keeping vehicles properly tuned.



Ozone Action Day (Photo: KVUE Storm Team, KVUE)

TCEQ also declared Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas to have Ozone Action Days on Wednesday.

[TAP OR CLICK HERE \(https://www.tceq.texas.gov/airquality/monops/ozonefacts.html\)](https://www.tceq.texas.gov/airquality/monops/ozonefacts.html) for more information about ozone from the TCEQ.

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Lead at Cross Bayou site 31 times safe level: site report

[Lex Talamo](#), alexa.talamo@shreveporttimes.com Published 7:01 a.m. CT Sept. 14, 2017



(Photo: By Mike Mangham and Mark Mangham)

It's unclear whether the City of Shreveport will continue to buy land at the Cross Bayou project site now that the city council has killed Mayor Ollie Tyler's bond funding proposal.

Shreveport Chief Administrative Officer Brian Crawford at a public meeting hosted Aug. 30 by the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce that the city would proceed with negotiating for the land along Cross Bayou regardless of whether the Pelicans chose Shreveport as home for a minor league affiliate.

If that remains true, the city's continuing interest in Cross Bayou property raises another question: who would pay for the remediation of a 10-acre tract that currently has soil and groundwater contamination problems for which state regulators are demanding a clean-up plan.

Councilwoman Stephanie Lynch cited in her recent resolution urging Mayor Ollie Tyler to decline a New Orleans Pelicans team for Shreveport that concerns about environmental issues at part of the development site had been largely left out of public discussion.

Concerns about soil and groundwater contamination at the site are real — and probably time-consuming to address.

Soil at the private scrap yard at the site of the proposed sports complex and mixed-use development in Shreveport contains more than 25 times the petroleum hydrocarbons and 31 times the lead that Louisiana regulators generally deem safe.

The scrap yard also has concerning levels of arsenic and lead in the ground water, according to site investigations.

The metal recycling facility, operated under the name General Scrap Material, faces an order from state regulators to prepare a plan by the end of this month for addressing the environmental concerns.

Environmental concerns at the scrap yard must be brought into compliance before the city could consider building on that land, Jean Kelly, a spokeswoman for the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, said this week.

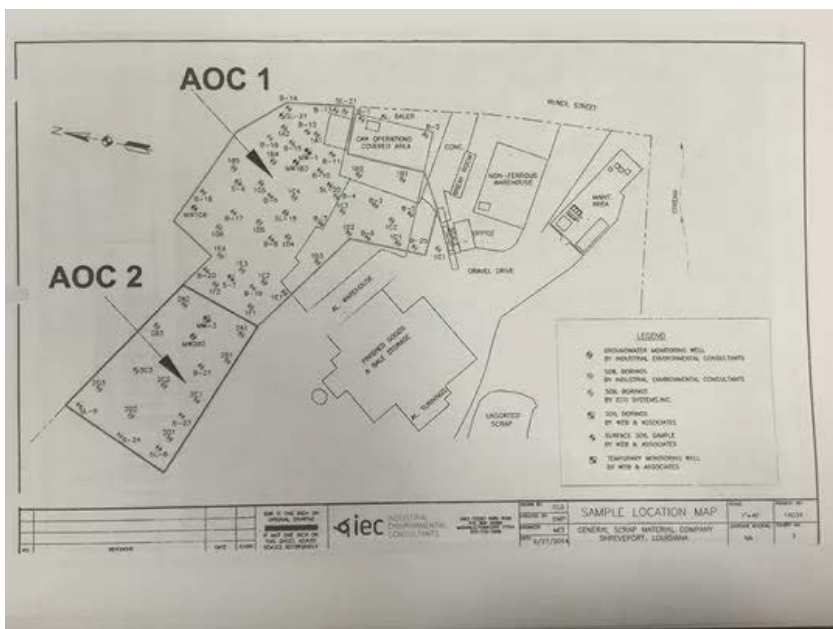
A look at the Cross Bayou Project

"The land would have to be remediated," Kelly said. "They have to bring it up to a certain level, and that standard is higher for apartments than it would be for a parking lot."

The City of Shreveport did not respond requests for comment following the council's surprise Tuesday council vote nixing funding for the sports arena.

Problems, remediation

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Two areas of General Scrap with identified elevated lead levels are identified in this diagram included in a 2014 site investigation report. (Photo: Lex Talama/The Times)

City government would have needed to acquire the 10-acre General Scrap tract to proceed with the Cross Bayou project, which was to consist of a mixed-use development and sports complex, and perhaps other any other development in the area.

General Scrap, at 200 North McNeil St. in Shreveport, has been a scrap metal recycling facility south of the Shreveport Water Works pumping station since 1928.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality on May 22 sent a "notice of deficiencies" to General Scrap. The notice stemmed from an October 2014 site investigation report from Industrial Environmental Consultants, a Nashville-based company.

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The Cross Bayou project, including a sports complex and a mixed use development, would be built along the riverfront. (Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

That 2014 report noted concerning levels of lead, arsenic, PCB's — or polychlorinated biphenyls — and diesel range organics, also called petroleum hydrocarbons.

Among the consultant's findings:

- Lead levels in the soil exceeded 1,400 parts per million — the Louisiana Industrial Cleanup Level — in 30 of 72 samples, with a maximum concentration at 44,100 parts per million. Lead contamination extended 10 feet below the surface in some areas.
- Total PCB's in the soil exceeded the LDEQ soil standard of 0.9 parts per million in 26 of 49 samples, with a maximum level of 50 parts per million and an average of 11 parts per million.
- Petroleum hydrocarbons in the soil exceeded the allowed level of 1,000 parts per million in 10 of 36 samples, with a maximum concentration of 25,100 parts per million.
- Lead concentrations in groundwater samples exceeded the allowed level of .015 parts per million, with concentrations ranging from 0.0091 to 0.0175 parts per million.
- Arsenic levels slightly exceeded the allowed level of 0.01 parts per million at one area of the site, with a concentration of 0.0105 parts per million.

The Missouri Pacific Rail Company first collected soil samples along the scrap yard property line in the 1980s and reported "possible" contamination, but General Scrap "never received any follow up," according to a site investigation work plan.

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Facility Contact Person's E-mail Address: metan11@ccomark.com
 Investigation Location: Northeastern section of property.
 Investigation Size: Approximately 0.5 acres
 and Vertical Extent of the Area of Investigation has been identified? ☒ Yes ☐ No
 Current and Historical Uses of the Property on which the AOI is located and the Time
 Use/Activity: Used as a scrap metal recycling facility for the past 80 years.
 Events Occurred (if known): Former processing of PCB containing transformers,
and battery reclamation processes
 Contaminants (if known): PCB, Lead
 1/4

A site investigation noted unacceptable levels of lead and PCB in the soil at General Scrap in Shreveport, which the City of Shreveport hopes to acquire for its proposed Cross Bayou Project. (Photo: Lex Talamo/The Times)

The business underwent a restructuring in 2011 that included an environmental assessment. That same year, soil and groundwater sampling by the Tennessee-based company W.Z. Baumgartner and Associates and ECO Systems found lead contamination at the site, specifically in the northeast part of the property, according to the work plan.

The report called for "eventual remediation of the site," adding that "no emergency or interim remedial action was warranted" at the time, according to the 2014 site investigation report.

Areas that since have been "cleaned up" — meaning they are now inactive or modified — include the former car crusher area in the northeast corner, the North Side miscellaneous scrap and abandoned equipment storage area along the north boundary, and a former iron turning area on the far northwest corner of the site.

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The City of Shreveport is in negotiations to purchase the property currently operated by General Scrap for the Cross Bayou Project. General Scrap is currently in the remediation process, on order by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to bring the land up to environmental standards. (Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

The 2014 site investigation report identified two specific areas of concern at General Scrap, noting that a "black, granular material" — also mentioned in the 2017 "notice of deficiencies" letter— probably was due to a buried battery casing pit and likely was the source of the lead contamination.

The report noted that the lead, arsenic and PCB contamination "could be a combination of prior practices or processes conducted at the site."

On-site waste piles and burial pits for battery casings were common treatment and storage techniques before establishment and enforcement of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, according to the report. The act gave the Environmental Protection Agency increased authority to control hazardous waste.

According to that report, the leaching of lead from soil to groundwater "appears to be minimal" and impacted only those who worked on site.

Remediation

The 2014 site investigation noted that the site would be backfilled to standard using "clean fill materials" following removal of all contaminated soil.
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The Cross Bayou project, including a sports complex and a mixed use development, would be built along the riverfront. (Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

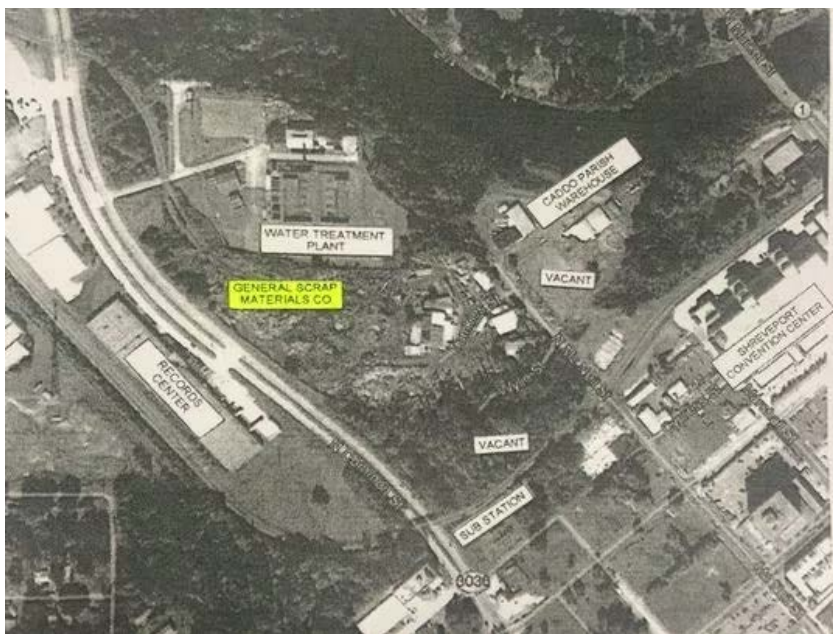
The report also noted: "The anticipated future use of the (General Scrap Metal) property will continue to be a scrap and metal recycling facility including processes, operations and land use which currently exists."

What does the history of environmental issues and current contamination mean for those who eventually would move into apartments or retail space on the site following remediation?

In the May 22 "notice of deficiencies" letter, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality directed the company to develop a plan for bringing the property up to environmental standards, subject to LDEQ approval.

General Scrap's operation manager, Brandon Yarnell, asked on Aug. 1 for a 60-day extension for completing the plan, which LDEQ granted.

The company must meet a Sept. 28 deadline or face "possible enforcement procedures," according to a later LDEQ letter, dated Aug. 18.



A diagram showing the location of General Scrap in Shreveport, included in a site investigation that found environmental violations. (Photo: Lex Talamo/The Times)

Shawn Ivey, of PPM Consultants, responded to LDEQ's May 22 notice of deficiencies in a Sept. 1 letter on behalf of Jackson Iron and Metal, which according to the Caddo Parish Tax Assessor's Office owns the General Scrap land (<https://www.caddoassessor.org/publicsearch/Search.aspx>).

Ivey said a work plan was being developed that would address groundwater concerns, data gaps, health and safety, and analysis of elevated lead levels and all other contaminants of concern.

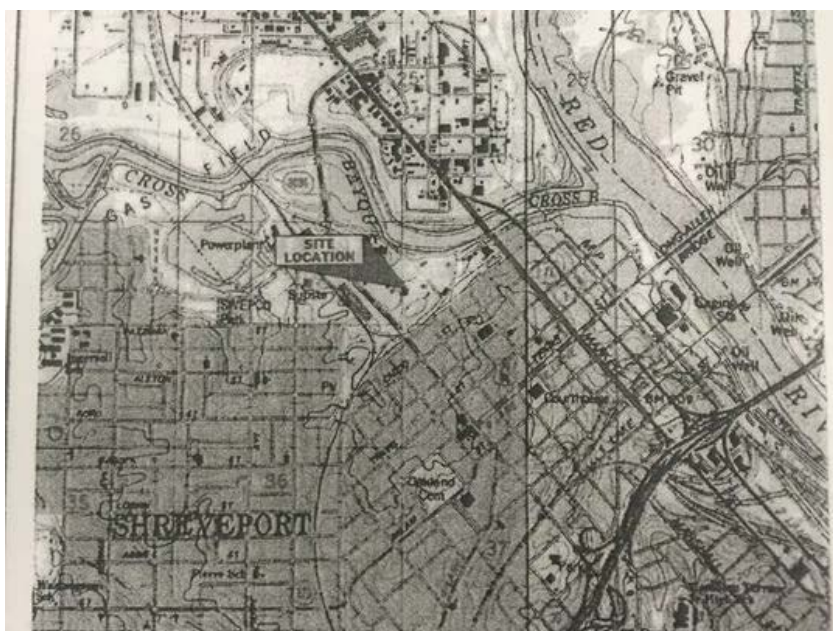
Ivey said his organization needed to collect more field and lab data about contaminants and ground water samples, as well as conduct an aquifer test. He estimated the time needed to create the plan would be at least three weeks.

The state agency is relying for now on the site studies completed by the private consultants.

"We take everything seriously, but at this point we haven't had much access to the site so we don't know how much of each contaminant is there," Greg Langley, LDEQ press secretary, said Tuesday.

Langley said the department had no reason to believe General Scrap would miss the Sept. 28 deadline. He estimated the agency then would need three to four months decide whether to approve the plan.

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Who would pay?

It's not yet certain who would pay for remediation if the city acquires the General Scrap property before the facility brings the land into compliance.

City Attorney William Bradford said at Monday's council work session that responsibility lies with General Scrap.

"The city would not take any kind of liability, that headache or that burden," Bradford told council at its Monday work session.

Brian Wolfe, the CEO for the city's likely private partner in the Cross Bayou development, Corporate Realty, said his company was aware of the environmental challenges at the site.

"There are no challenges on this site that we haven't encountered on other sites," Wolfe said at the Monday council work session. "Nothing has been identified that we have not successfully overcome before."

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The Cross Bayou project, including a sports complex and a mixed use development, would be built along the riverfront. (Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

Wolfe said, in a separate written statement, that Corporate Realty would work closely with local and state partners to remediate the Cross Bayou area "in the safest manner possible."

"We would assume prior to the purchase of property, any remediation plans would be approved by (the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality) with remediation costs funded by the responsible parties," Wolfe wrote in his statement.

Site's future

Bradford, the city attorney, said in an emailed statement that any clean-up costs were expected to factor into negotiations with General Scrap.

He did not clarify what "factor into negotiations" means, although it could mean that the city might agree to pay more for a site that has been cleaned up. Liability for future, unforeseen cleanup needs not anticipated in current site investigations also might be subject to negotiation.

"The City will continue to seek guidance from LDEQ during this process," Bradford wrote. "The City is not in a position to speculate at this time regarding action after the September 28, 2017 deadline, but it will continue to negotiate with the property owner and the LDEQ regarding this matter."

Bradford said the city anticipated remediation would occur before construction. He added that the city expected both remediation and construction to adhere to worker safety considerations.

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The City of Shreveport is in negotiations to purchase the property currently operated by General Scrap for the Cross Bayou Project. General Scrap is currently in the remediation process, on order by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to bring the land up to environmental standards. (Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

"The City expects that the remediation will be done to a level that is suitable for the proposed development's intended use," Bradford wrote in response to questions from The Times.

A complication: the standard to which the property must be cleaned would depend on its future use.

"Residential standards are more stringent than industrial standards," Langley said.

The proposed mixed-use development, which Shreveport Mayor Ollie Tyler announced Aug. 22, was to have included residential and retail space and a hotel along Cross Bayou near the Shreveport Water Works Museum on the north side of downtown. The development would encompass the General Scrap facility and the Shreveport Police Department's mounted patrol barn.

Also part of the proposed development: a sports complex with a 3,200-seat arena, intended as a home for a minor league affiliate of the New Orleans Pelicans professional basketball team.

Tyler and Bradford said at the city council work session Monday that the city had taken moving the scrap yard to the Martin Luther King neighborhood "off the table" following a meeting with members of the Caddo Parish Commission. Commissioner Steven Jackson said in an op-ed essay The Times published last week that he was opposed to moving the scrapyards to the MLK neighborhood.

"The City intends to protect its citizens and will assist the scrap yard owners in identifying an appropriate location that does not jeopardize the safety of our residents," Bradford said.

General Scrap timeline

1928 General Scrap opens as a scrap metal recycling facility.

2011 General Scrap undergoes a restructuring, which includes an environmental assessment of the site.

February, April 2011 W.Z. Baumgartner & Associates Inc. (Franklin, Tennessee) and EcoSystems Inc. conduct preliminary soil and groundwater sampling that reveals lead contamination at General Scrap

November 2011 The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality is notified about contamination at the General Scrap site.

October 2012 WZB prepares a Site Investigation Work plan for General Scrap Material

January 2014 Industrial Environmental Consultants LLC (Nashville, Tennessee) conducts a site investigation report and remedial action plan of General Scrap.

October 2014 IEC reports findings from its January investigation.

March 18, 2017 The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Remediation Division, receives the 2014 site investigation report and remedial action plan.

May 22 The LDEQ sends a "Notice of Deficiencies" to General Scrap.

Aug. 1 General Scrap requests a 60-day extension to submit a work plan.

Aug. 18 LDEQ grants 60-day extension.

Sept. 28 LDEQ grants this new deadline to General Scrap to submit its work plan.

Source: October 2014 Site Investigation Report and Remedial Action Plan, prepared by Industrial Environmental Consultants LLC.

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U.S. and Mexico set to sign landmark Colorado River water-sharing deal

Ian James, The Desert Sun Published 1:53 p.m. PT Sept. 13, 2017



(Photo: Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun)

The U.S. and Mexican governments are close to signing a landmark Colorado River deal that will establish rules for sharing water over the next decade and lay out cooperative efforts intended to head off severe shortages.

Mexican and American officials have scheduled a signing ceremony on Sept. 26 in Ciudad Juárez, officials at California water districts said this week. They said that formal event will be followed by a ceremonial signing in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Sept. 27 attended by representatives from U.S. states.

"This is important to both countries, and will now allow the states and our federal partners to refocus back to drought contingency planning," said Bart Fisher, chair of California's Colorado River Board.

California water suppliers – including the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Water District – approved related agreements on Tuesday, taking some of the final steps necessary to complete the deal. California's Colorado River Board also signed off at a meeting on Wednesday.

The new accord – titled Minute No. 323 to the 1944 Mexican Water Treaty – is set to expire at the end of this year.

The deal will extend provisions in the current agreement, known as Minute 319, that specify reductions in water deliveries during a shortage, as well as increases in water deliveries during wet periods. The agreement also provides for Mexico to continue storing water in Lake Mead, near Las Vegas, helping to boost the reservoir's levels, which in the past few years have [dropped to record lows](https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2016/05/19/lake-mead-declines-new-record-low/84597120/) ([/story/news/environment/2016/05/19/lake-mead-declines-new-record-low/84597120/](https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2016/05/19/lake-mead-declines-new-record-low/84597120/)).

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Lake Mead is the country's largest reservoir. California, Arizona and Nevada have been negotiating a proposed plan to take less water from the reservoir to avert severe shortages. (Photo: Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun)

A final version of the agreement has not yet been released. But according to a summary released by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the agreement will establish a “binational water scarcity contingency plan,” in which Mexico will join U.S. states in temporarily taking less water out of Lake Mead to reduce the risks of the reservoir reaching critical levels.

Those commitments by Mexico would only take effect if California, Arizona and Nevada finish their own Drought Contingency Plan, under which the states would forgo larger amounts of water than they’ve previously agreed to as Lake Mead’s level declines.

The U.S. government has yet to announce details of the upcoming signing ceremony.

“We are very, very close,” said Lori Kuczmanski, a public affairs officer at the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission in El Paso. “The signing date is not yet confirmed because we don’t have all the domestic approvals that we need. I expect that within the next week we will have that information and we can move forward.”

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The agreement reflects the nations’ need to cooperate on water even as tensions remain over President Donald Trump’s immigration policies and his plans for building a new wall along the border.

The Colorado River and its tributaries provide water for about 40 million people and more than 5 million acres of farmland.

The legal framework that divvies up the Colorado River was established during wetter times nearly a century ago, starting with the 1922 Colorado River Compact. That and subsequent agreements have handed out more water than what flows in the river in an average year, leading to chronic overuse.

On top of that mismatch between supply and demand, the river has dwindled during a 17-year drought. Climate change is adding to the strains on the river, and scientists have projected warming will likely cause the river’s flow to decrease by 35 percent or more (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/2016WR019638/full>) this century.

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Water from the Colorado River rushes into a groundwater recharge facility near Palm Springs, Calif., Wed. July, 5, 2017. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

Talks on the U.S.-Mexico agreement began during President Barack Obama’s administration and have continued with negotiating sessions convened on both sides of the border by the International Boundary and Water Commission, which includes representatives of both governments.

To complete the deal, U.S. water agencies and states needed to sign off on agreements including a U.S.-funded program to invest \$31.5 million in water conservation projects in Mexico. Those projects will include infrastructure upgrades such as concrete lining for leaky canals and other improvements to reduce water losses from distribution systems.

The federal government will provide \$16.5 million, while the remaining \$15 million will come from four water agencies, including the Imperial Irrigation District, the Metropolitan Water District, the Southern Nevada Water Authority and the Central Arizona Water Conservation District.

Each of the water agencies will contribute part of the funding. In return, they will receive a portion of the water freed up through conservation in Mexico.

The conservation projects are intended to generate a total of 229,000 acre-feet of water – enough to cover an area two-thirds the size of Los Angeles with a foot of water. Of that, 50,000 acre-feet will be used to give a boost to the Colorado River system and 70,000 acre-feet will be used to “satisfy the U.S. commitment to provide water for the environment.”

After the U.S. water districts receive the remainder of that water, Mexico will be able to use the additional water supplies made available through the conservation projects.

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The Colorado River flows near Arches National Park in Utah in February 2016. (Photo: Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun)

The Imperial Irrigation District's board approved seven agreements related to the U.S.-Mexico deal on Tuesday. The district holds the biggest single water entitlement along the Colorado River and supplies water to farms producing crops from alfalfa to Brussels sprouts.

IID Water Department Manager Tina Shields said there's an interest on both sides of the border in “continuing the cooperative measures outlined in this agreement.”

“This allows for the continued operation of the river system as a basin partnership, and provides benefits to both countries' water users by more specifically defining reservoir management strategies during this historic drought,” Shields said in a statement. “This leads to a higher level of operational certainty, particularly for lower basin water users that rely upon water deliveries released from Lake Mead.”

[RELATED: U.S. and Mexico finalizing Colorado River deal \(/story/news/environment/2017/08/11/u-s-and-mexico-finalizing-colorado-river-deal/560603001/\)](/story/news/environment/2017/08/11/u-s-and-mexico-finalizing-colorado-river-deal/560603001/)

The agreement, which will remain in effect through 2026, lays out a strategy for Mexico and the U.S. states to jointly put the brakes on water use to reduce the risks of a crash in the system if the drought persists.

As of this week, Lake Mead stands at just 39 percent full, with its level at an elevation of 1,081 feet.

Under federal guidelines, the Interior Department would declare a shortage – which would trigger cutbacks for Arizona and Nevada – if Lake Mead's level is projected to be below 1,075 feet as of the start of the following year.

Earlier this year, the Bureau of Reclamation estimated the odds of Lake Mead hitting shortage levels in 2019 at 31 percent. A previous projection had put the odds at 50-50 before last winter brought an above-average snowpack across the Rocky Mountains.

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The marina at Callville Bay has been moved repeatedly as the level of Lake Mead has dropped. This photo was taken in 2014 near the marina's administration building, where the water level stood when the reservoir was nearly full in 2000. (Photo: Richard Lui/The Desert Sun)

The treaties that originally divided the river among seven states and Mexico allocated 7.5 million acre-feet of water per year for states in the river's upper basin, including Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico; 7.5 million acre-feet for the lower basin states of Nevada, Arizona and California; and 1.5 million acre-feet for Mexico.

A series of negotiated agreements between Mexico and the U.S. have been tacked on as amendments to the countries' 1944 treaty, and those deals are formally known as minutes – a reference to the minutes of diplomatic meetings where the agreements are reached.

For decades, so much water has been diverted from dams all along the Colorado that the river seldom meets the sea. The river's delta in Mexico has become a dusty stretch of desert.

Mexico diverts its share of the river from the Morelos Dam to sustain desert cities and the farmlands of the Mexicali Valley.

Under the agreement, Mexico, the U.S., and nongovernmental organizations will team up to secure water for wetlands south of the border, plus \$18 million for habitat restoration and monitoring.

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The federal government's summary of Minute 323 says the two countries “share a common vision on a clear need for continued and additional actions to reduce the risk of reaching critical reservoir elevations at Lake Mead.”

The document details how continued declines at the reservoir would trigger a rising scale of cutbacks in water deliveries, with Mexico contributing alongside the states – as long as the states have a similar plan in place.

Last year, water managers in California, Arizona and Nevada had expressed hope they would soon finish negotiating their plan to collectively take less water out of Lake Mead during drought. But that agreement hasn't been finalized, and one sticking point has been California's long-delayed efforts to cope with the deterioration of the Salton Sea, which is sustained by Colorado River water.

DESERT SUN SPECIAL REPORT: [California's Dying Sea \(/series/saltonsea/\)](/series/saltonsea/)

Until recently, IID had warned that it wouldn't take part in the proposed deal until the state presents a credible “road map” to restore deteriorating shoreline habitats and cover up growing stretches of dust-spewing lakebed around the shrinking lake.

Within the past month, though, IID and two other local agencies [negotiated an agreement \(/story/salton-sea/2017/09/07/agencies-urge-california-water-board-approve-salton-sea-agreement/643712001/\)](/story/salton-sea/2017/09/07/agencies-urge-california-water-board-approve-salton-sea-agreement/643712001/) with Gov. Jerry Brown's administration that would commit state officials to following through on their pledges at the Salton Sea over the next decade.

That proposed Salton Sea deal sets annual targets for California agencies to build thousands of acres of ponds, wetlands and other dust-control projects around the lake as its shorelines retreat over the next 10 years. The lake is about to start shrinking rapidly next year as more water is transferred from the Imperial Valley to growing cities in Southern California.

If the proposed Salton Sea agreement is approved by California's State Water Resources Control Board, it would finally help clear the way for the larger three-state agreement, and it would become one more piece in an interconnected web of deals – all of them focused on strategies for coping with less water as the Colorado River dwindles.

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HOUSTON EPA LAB SLATED TO CLOSE



KATE WHEELING · AN HOUR AGO

The Environmental Protection Agency's regional lab in Houston, Texas, is **slated** to close in 2020, the *Houston Chronicle* reports.

The Region 6 Environmental Services Laboratory, which is expected to be a hub of soil and water testing in the wake of **Hurricane Harvey**, employs about 50 people and serves five states. But, thanks largely to the Trump administration's steep cuts to the agency's funding, the lab will not renew the lease for its property in southwest Houston.

On Wednesday, environmentalist and labor union groups gathered in Washington, D.C., to protest the lab's closure, noting its critical role in Harvey recovery and testing samples from Superfund sites.

Officials still don't know exactly how polluted the water in Houston is at this point, but the Texas Tribune **called** the floodwaters a "mix of bacteria, viruses, metals and other potentially toxic pollutants leached from the myriad of refineries and chemical plants in the area, along with an untold number of submerged septic tanks and dozens of Superfund sites."

The next closest EPA regional lab is 400 miles away in Oklahoma.

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Texas begins long march toward recovery from Hurricane Harvey

Tw e e t

Featured Column / State Capital Highlights
Ed Sterling / September 14, 2017

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As contaminated waters receded and mountains of debris from flooded homes and ruined belongings grew last week, a picture of post-hurricane Texas developed and the process of weighing impacts to lives, property, and infrastructure began.

Gov. Greg Abbott delivered a series of announcements and proclamations related to catastrophic flooding and wind damage brought by Hurricane Harvey to more than 50 Gulf Coast and inland counties in late August and early September.

On Sept. 7, Abbott thanked Congress for passing a \$15.3 billion hurricane relief package and called the bipartisan action "an encouraging sign."

On Sept. 9, Abbott wrote to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt, expressing support for a request by the Texas Water Development Board to streamline federal funding for flood and water infrastructure projects related to Hurricane Harvey. The board administers EPA's state revolving funds, which will be used to repair and rebuild water, wastewater, and storm-water systems in communities affected by Harvey.

Also on Sept. 9, Abbott and Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp, who heads the newly created Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas, met with Beaumont officials, along with leaders of many state agencies. It was the first stop in a three-city, five-day trip to discuss the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey and get input on how the commission can assist in the rebuilding and recovery effort.

Mosquito spraying begins

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) on Sept. 6 announced the launch of FEMA-assisted mosquito control measures over the Hurricane Harvey-stricken counties of Refugio and Bee.

Areas of standing water may increase the number of mosquitoes capable of spreading diseases such as the West Nile and Zika viruses, the DSHS said.

Paxton applauds ruling

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton praised a decision Sept. 5 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit to uphold the state's voter identification law that was blocked last month by a Corpus Christi federal district court.

A three-judge panel of the Fifth Circuit voted 2-1 to overturn an injunction granted by the lower court. The ruling, Paxton said, means that an interim court remedy is in place for 2017, preserving the requirement of an ID while allowing those without an accepted ID to vote by signing a sworn declaration stating that they have a reasonable impediment to obtaining one.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 5, a law passed by the Texas Legislature this year amending the voter ID law to comply with a prior 5th Circuit ruling, takes effect in 2018, Paxton said.

Paxton echoed the U.S. Department of Justice, saying the new law "eradicates any discriminatory effect or intent" and expands voter identification options.

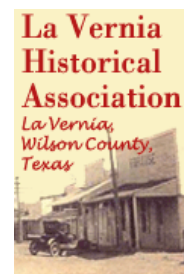
DACA decision pleases AG

Attorney General Paxton on Sept. 5 applauded President Donald Trump's decision to phase out within the next six months the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program created by President Barack Obama in 2012.

DACA granted lawful presence and work permits to nearly 800,000 people who were brought to the United States as children by foreign nationals. President Trump left it to Congress to pass a law by March 5, 2018, that would allow affected individuals to continue residing in the United States.

Hegar reports on taxes

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar last week released the total of state revenues collected during the fiscal



year that began Sept. 1, 2016, and ended Aug. 31, 2017. Hegar also posted a state revenue report for the month of August.

Sales-tax revenue for the year was \$28.9 billion, 0.3 percent ahead of the \$28.8 billion projected in the January biennial revenue estimate, and general revenue-related revenue was \$52.3 billion, or 1.2 percent ahead of the projection of \$51.7 billion. State sales-tax revenue for the month of August totaled \$2.48 billion, 0.9 percent less than in August 2016, he said.

Also, Hegar reported that Texas' "all funds" tax collections for fiscal year 2017 came to \$49.6 billion, or 0.2 percent less than his \$49.7 billion projection, and all funds revenue totaled \$111.2 billion, or 1.4 percent less than his \$112.8 billion projection.

Revenue distribution set

Comptroller Hegar on Sept. 7 announced his office would send cities, counties, transit systems, and special purpose taxing districts \$668.3 million in local sales-tax allocations for September, an amount 6.2 percent more than the Office of the Comptroller distributed in September 2016.

Allocations are based on sales made in July by businesses that report tax monthly.

Ed Sterling is the director of member services for the Texas Press Association in Austin. ♦ Contact him at 512-477-6755 or edsterling@texaspress.com.

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They got hundreds of thousands to rally. Where does the March for Science go from here?

By [Lev Facher @levfacher](#)

September 14, 2017



People carry a March for Science banner and signs as they pass the Environmental Protection Agency during the March For Science in Washington in April. Sait Serkan Gurbuz/AP

WASHINGTON — The hundreds of thousands of people who [rallied on the National Mall](#)¹ and in cities worldwide for the March for Science in April came to be noticed. It was a march meant to demonstrate enthusiasm and political clout, and by those measures, organizers believe they succeeded.

But as two dozen of them met in New York the following month for a debrief, they faced an obvious reality: A grass-roots organization that was quickly formed to plan a singular event was not, at least immediately, equipped for far-reaching and long-term science advocacy.

“The big picture question was (and continues to be): How do we successfully transition from a march into a movement and how do we continue to mobilize our diverse, interdisciplinary, passionate supporters for science advocacy?” Caroline Weinberg, one of the national march’s co-organizers, wrote to STAT in an e-mail from Paris, where she was meeting with that city’s local march coordinators.

In the coming weeks, the main organizers of the March for Science will begin to roll out their long-term strategy. Whether they can succeed in their efforts is an open question. Six months after the march, the

movement remains a nascent one, despite organizers' [pledges of sustained activism](#)². But the goal, organizers say, is clear: At a time when many in the community feel like science is under assault, create structures that sell and incorporate science into every level of daily life, and ensure that science advocates are recognized as a constituency at every level of government.



[Read More](#)²

[7 takeaways from the March for Science](#)²

For now, organizers have acknowledged that changing the way science is incorporated into American society — from elementary schools to universities and from city councils to the federal government — takes more than a one-day event, and needs to be done largely on a local level.

So in Houston, the [local chapter](#)³ has created a communications network to help scientists displaced by Hurricane Harvey temporarily relocate labs and continue their work wherever scientists offered space. That offer was quickly extended to researchers based in the Caribbean and Florida displaced by the more recent Hurricane Irma.

In Albuquerque, N.M., an organizer has partnered with a local doctor focused on health equity issues. Together, the pair is considering a bike ride during which participants could take water samples to measure contamination from open uranium pits near Native American reservations.

And in Indianapolis, organizers of the local march are using leftover funds raised before the rally to administer a [grant program](#)⁴ for area schools, awarding up to \$500 to science teachers who submit a detailed plan for a hands-on lesson.



People hold signs of pioneering women in science during the March for Science in Washington. Sait Serkan Gurbuz/AP

Already, several local groups have found that sustaining political outreach takes immense organization.

In the Great Lakes region, for instance, a rumored [plan to shutter a regional office](#)⁵ of the Environmental Protection Agency required a number of local march chapters to band together.

“We started getting in contact with each other and forming a regional network so the larger marches on the Midwest could stay together,” said Rufus Cochran, a co-organizer for the Indianapolis march. His group is one of a number of chapters that have been incorporated as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations — a status the national group is currently seeking as well.

The threat of the EPA consolidation faded, but the groups in the region, which are planning a summit to meet in person this fall, have responded to other issues. In May, when President Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris climate accord, the Midwestern groups led a campaign to pressure local officials to publicly acknowledge climate change as a scientifically proven and human-driven reality.

Cochran said that model of simple but effective advocacy could be replicable by science boosters nationwide.

“We’re not narcissistic enough to think we did it ourselves,” Cochran said, referring to the decision by some local mayors to issue statements denouncing the withdrawal from the Paris agreement. But, he said,

“our goal isn’t to become a policy think tank, at least currently. That’s pretty ambitious. Our goal is to change the perception around science and bring science to people in different ways.”

The local efforts have zeroed in on projects befitting the challenges in various cities. Beyond coordinating to find scientists temporary lab space, Houston organizers have focused on science accessibility across the income spectrum.

“Children raised in low-income households have little exposure to science, even at school, where resources are often severely limited,” AJ Ruley, a Houston organizer, wrote in an email to STAT. “A science drive is in planning stages, along with a blood drive, we will offer STEM focused books and science kits for children and youth, especially those in low-income areas that were destroyed by Hurricane Harvey.”

While many have cited single instances of concern like an EPA office shuttering, a single piece of legislation, or even a hurricane, organizers have vowed in the future to remain organized regardless of circumstance.

“We are working to make sure that we don’t focus our efforts only around times when something particularly disastrous is happening,” Weinberg wrote. “That’s a critical part of advocacy and a very effective one, but we’re hoping to give people the tools and resources to be independent advocates year round — to hold representatives accountable for their actions every day.”

Monitoring 50 state legislatures and innumerable city governments — to say nothing of the federal government — remains a challenge, especially from afar. When many of the national planners met in New York, it was their first face-to-face encounter with other organizers.

The national staff that has been built out largely post-march includes nine part-time employees. Its lone full-timer is Chief Operating Officer Terry Kush, a former consultant for the National Consumers League who joined in August.

Koren Temple-Perry, the march’s new communications director, told STAT that Kush’s role would focus on providing support to satellite marches. And the staff will continue to oversee fundraising, which March for Science will soon ramp up in anticipation of its fall initiatives rollout.

The group raised more than \$1 million just prior to the march and during the second quarter, Temple-Perry wrote. “Those sources come mainly from donations and merchandise sales and we are planning larger fundraising campaigns this fall,” she wrote.

7

[Trending](#)⁸[IBM pitched its Watson supercomputer as a revolution in cancer care. It's nowhere close](#)⁷

The organization's plans for the rest of 2017 will focus on allowing cities worldwide to do what Houston, Indianapolis, Albuquerque, and countless others have done already.

"Part of that is going to be an advocacy guide on best practices paired with 'issue' one pagers," Weinberg wrote. "Instead of telling people what evidence based policy they should call their representative about, we want to encourage a conversation around why. Get scientists to get into their communities to share that 'why' — to build a powerful community of science supporters with the resources and knowledge to advocate for science in policy and society."

The group also plans a "students for science" initiative, a high school student-designed initiative aimed at getting teens involved in activism.

There is also talk of bringing the March for Science back next April for an encore.

"I would like to see a lot more progress a lot faster, but that's not how building something far-reaching works," said Valorie Aquino, a local organizer in Albuquerque who sits on the national leadership committee. "We've got a big table, we've invited a lot of people. I'm really excited for the coming months when these campaigns get more solidified."

About the Author



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Washington Correspondent

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Houston's 'flood czar' says Harvey has brought the city to a decision point on flood control

Stephen Costello, the city's chief resilience officer, expects to play a big role in how Houston spends its Hurricane Harvey recovery dollars.

BY **NEENA SATIJA** AND **KIAH COLLIER** SEPT. 13, 2017 21 HOURS AGO



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Houston "flood czar" Stephen Costello in his office on Sept. 12, 2017.

📷 Brandon Formby / The Texas Tribune


When we caught up with Houston's newly-appointed "flood czar" last year, he told us he had no money and no staff.

That's still largely the case, Stephen Costello told us in an interview on Tuesday at his Houston City Hall office. He now has one paid staff member.

In the wake of Hurricane Harvey's record floods, the city of Houston is poised to receive billions — maybe even tens of billions — of recovery dollars in the coming years that may cover significant improvements to the city's woefully inadequate drainage system as well as other projects to reduce flooding. And Costello said on Tuesday that he expects to play a key role in deciding how that money will be spent.

"Over 60 percent of our infrastructure is beyond its useful life," he said. "So that's what we're dealing with right now."

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He said at least some of the money should be used to buy up entire neighborhoods that border bayous and have inadequate flood protection and then to turn those areas into green space. That would be a big change: previous buyout programs have had little success because of inadequate funding and opposition from homeowners who don't want to move.

Costello said repeatedly on Tuesday that the city will have to "get creative" to find the extra money to pay for all the flood control upgrades that are needed in a city where, according to Costello, more than half of the homes that have flooded in recent years weren't in a designated flood plain. And he added that development rules will have to change to help prevent more damage from flooding.

Below is an edited and condensed version of our interview.

TT: Last year at a meeting you told residents angry about flooding that 'I don't have any money, I don't have any staff.' Has that changed?

COSTELLO: My former chief of staff when I was a city council member has joined me, back in January. So we've doubled our size [laughs]. So that's a good thing. But we still don't have money. We interface internally with the departments who do have money for flooding and drainage. And we're out seeking additional monies whether it's with federal dollars or state dollars.

TT: So your staff has doubled in the last year from one person to two (including you). And you don't have any extra money in your department. Will Harvey change your role or the

scope of your role?

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Maybe it'll just make my job a little bigger. I think the real issue is that we need more funding. Everything is all about the dollar. I mean every engineering problem has a solution. And the real question is whether or not the public wants to pay for it.

TT: Last year you said you think they are willing to pay if they come to understand the issue and how much it's going to cost to address it. Has Harvey helped with that?

COSTELLO: I don't know. I'll be candid with you.

I think they're beginning to recognize that there is a risk that there's always a possibility of flooding no matter where you are in the city of Houston, whereas I think people that didn't flood prior to this event have always felt immune from flooding. And I think now they realize that the risk is everywhere.

TT: How has Harvey changed the public conversation around flooding?

COSTELLO: Usually a flooding event is an isolated event. It doesn't impact the majority of the community. And they're usually five or ten years apart. So people forget and they don't really pay much attention to the need for infrastructure investment. The 2015 [the Memorial Day flood], 2016 [the Tax Day Flood] sort of changed that. The frequency of flooding got a little bit more common. And then we have a regional event like Harvey, so now everybody's starting to talk about it. So that's a good thing. It's a good thing that we're starting to talk about it. The real issue is: What are we going to do about it and where do we go moving forward?

TT: Last year you told us that there needs to be a discussion on development regulations in Houston. Has any progress been made on that front?

COSTELLO: We're going to roll out [a task force] in October. And the mayor is really excited about it. It's a group of probably a little over 50 people. There will be a couple of developers, people that are representing some of the trade associations, engineers, landscape architects, bureaucrats like myself, as well as community people.

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We want a dialogue between all the groups so that the development community can get a better understanding of what the community at large is thinking. And then we can have a frank discussion about these issues and we want to address it.

TT: Have you been able to secure any extra money for flood prevention as flood czar?

COSTELLO: We created the Stormwater Action Team, going into areas [where] we have known flooding problems and doing whatever maintenance-related type activities that we have to do. The mayor set aside \$10 million [from the city's General Fund] for that. We've about exhausted that money. And so we're in the process of figuring out how we get additional funding. And that was prior to Hurricane Harvey.

TT: How much more money do you need for those maintenance projects?

We don't know. Because we're doing it on an ongoing basis. It could be in the tens of millions. It could be north of a hundred million dollars.

TT: It sounds like you came into this job and you said 'We need more money.' The county is spending something like \$120 million per year on construction and maintenance of flood control projects. How much is the city spending now? How much does it need?

COSTELLO: We're spending over \$250 million per year on — we call it 'street and drainage' so it's a combination of drainage and street and the reason why we combine the two is when you get an extreme event, the water travels down the street as well, so it's part of the drainage system.

Several years ago public works had made an estimate that in order to stay ahead of the decaying infrastructure they need about \$650 million a year ... to spend on their street and drainage program.

TT: What I'm hearing you say is that this is a pretty dire situation.

COSTELLO: I wouldn't say it's a dire situation.

I mean, the the problem has existed for a very, very long time. And as a result of this biblical event — [which] is what I call it — it's come to the forefront now. Our job, my job, is to make sure people don't forget. I mean that's why the mayor created this position, is to remind people that we have to keep continuing to invest in drainage infrastructure. And so the real issue is how how big are we going to get? Are we going to

be kind of microscopic in terms of doing these piecewise improvements or are we going to go global and figure out area-wide, how do we want to change the way we do drainage and flood control?

TT: Separate and apart from the drainage projects that we've been really focusing on, you have this task force you mentioned and people talking about development regulations. Do you see a component of this recovery potentially resulting in changing those regulations, strengthening them?

COSTELLO: What I see with this event will be looking at areas that are subject to repetitive flooding and figuring out ways to buy them out. I think you're going to see a pretty aggressive buyout program. The city has never been in the buyout business and (Harris County) flood control has been doing predominantly most of the buyout and their budget is less than \$3 million for this year for buyouts, which is a fairly nominal amount of money.

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Environment

Louisiana will use \$20 million in BP fines to expand a coastal monitoring program

By Della Hasselle, Contributing writer 24 HOURS AGO

Louisiana has received \$19.5 million in fines from the 2010 BP oil spill to expand a system to collect data on the effect of coastal restoration projects.

The System-Wide Assessment and Monitoring Program (http://thewaterinstitute.org/assets/docs/reports/5_9_16_SWAMP-Version-III_smaller.pdf), or SWAMP, monitors changes in Louisiana's ecosystem over time.

Among other things, it evaluates how human factors like restoration projects and climate change affect the environment, including wildlife, fisheries and certain types of vegetation.

SWAMP will be used to understand changes in the ecosystem, evaluate responses to sea-level rise and protect communities from flooding and other natural disasters, said Syed Khalil, a geologist assistant administrator for the state Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority.

"Ecosystem restoration is very complex," Khalil said. "What we are doing does not have any boilerplate template, so we need to monitor the results of restoration and then correct or modify our approach, if need be."

The coastal authority is in charge of an ambitious, \$92 billion plan (http://www.law.tulane.edu/uploadedFiles/Institutes_and_Centers/Water_Resources_Law_and_Policy/Content/Financing%20the%20Future%20Pt%201--The%20Cost.pdf) to protect and restore Louisiana's crumbling coast (<https://projects.propublica.org/larestoration/>).

Monitoring began in 2016 along the southeastern coast from Bayou Lafourche to the Chandeleur Sound. The new grant will allow the coastal authority to extend monitoring to the Louisiana-Texas border (<http://coastal.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017.08.31-RESTORE-ACT.pdf>).

Among the things SWAMP monitors are underwater topography, water quality, water salinity and weather conditions, Khalil said.

As part of the expansion, the system will track shifts in ocean currents and weather patterns.

The program is also designed to check on how Louisiana's coast is recovering from the 2010 BP spill.

"Ecosystem restoration is very complex ... What we are doing does not have any boilerplate template."

—Syed Khalil, Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority

The spill exposed "how fragile and vulnerable coastal Louisiana's ecosystem is," Khalil said, "and how important it is to build land, which will form the substrate for robust marshes and barrier islands."

Two other monitoring programs (<http://mississippiriverdelta.org/using-adaptive-management-to-help-restore-coastal-louisiana/>) have already been incorporated into SWAMP. One, the coastal authority's Coastwide Reference Monitoring System, (<https://www.lacoast.gov/crms2/home.aspx>) tracks changes in wetlands.

Another, the Barrier Island Comprehensive Monitoring Program (<https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2013/1083/>) , helps planners design and maintain restoration projects on the barrier islands.

Estelle Robichaux, an analyst with the Environmental Defense Fund, wrote about the importance of SWAMP in coastal restoration in 2015 (<http://mississippiriverdelta.org/using-adaptive-management-to-help-restore-coastal-louisiana/>) .

She wrote that the expansion was important because it would allow scientists to collect data on parts of Louisiana's ecosystem that hadn't been tracked, such as coastal waters, non-tidal freshwater habitats, riverine conditions and fisheries.

The Restore Council, established by Congress as part of the 2012 Restore Act, allocates Clean Water Act fines from the BP oil spill. The money is used for Gulf Coast restoration projects.

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Wildlife refuge in bad shape after hurricane



By Jessica Priest

Sept. 13, 2017 at 10:15 p.m.

Updated Sept. 13, 2017 at 10:30 p.m.



Two endangered whooping cranes are wintering in the marshland at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday. Barclay Fernandez/bfernandez@vic for The Victoria Advocate

Damaged marshland might displace whooping cranes this fall.

For updates

on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, call 361-286-3559.

Wade Harrell, who is coordinating the endangered species' recovery for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, got his first look at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Wednesday after Category 4 Hurricane Harvey made landfall Aug. 25.

"There was an initial sense of shock and awe," Harrell said, describing how the live oak trees many visitors are accustomed to seeing were stripped of their leaves by strong winds. "It was a lot to process on top of all the work that needs to be done."

In the marshes, Harrell found a significant amount of debris. Some of the debris was manmade and might take months to remove.

"There were refrigerators in there. Stuff that probably came out of people's houses in Rockport," he said.

Before some debris can be removed, the fish and wildlife service will consult with its experts on contaminants.

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Hurricane Harvey's storm surge also affected the refuge's freshwater ponds. It has as many as 70 that the whooping cranes could drink from in the past.

The San Antonio Bay shoreline that borders the refuge has also eroded, he said.

The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge covers about 115,000 acres, but the challenge the service faces in its cleanup effort is the refuge is not contiguous. Some parts abut private property, while others are only accessible by boat.

Although many animals call the refuge home, some visitors want to catch a glimpse of the tallest bird in North America, the whooping crane.

Standing at 5 feet, there were only 15 whooping cranes left in 1940. Now, there are more than 300 in the last naturally-occurring flock.

That flock is at Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park but will start migrating south next month.

In the fall and winter, the whooping cranes will forage for food on Texas' coast, anywhere between Port Aransas to Port O'Connor.

"On any given year, probably about 50 percent of the population is within refuge boundaries," Harrell said.

The refuge is closed, but Harrell said refuge manager, Joe Saenz, hopes to open a portion to the public as soon as possible.

"We know people are anxious to get out and see some of the changes that I described," Harrell said.

The hurricane hit the refuge twice, once when it made landfall in Rockport about 48 miles away and then when it traveled back out into the Gulf of Mexico.

The refuge is among eight closed because of the hurricane.

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